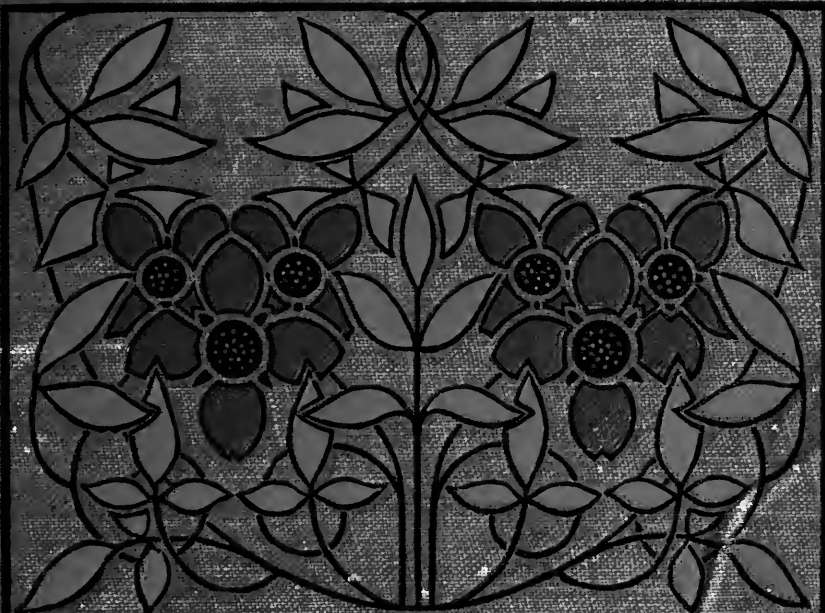


A Jilt's Journal

By "RITA"

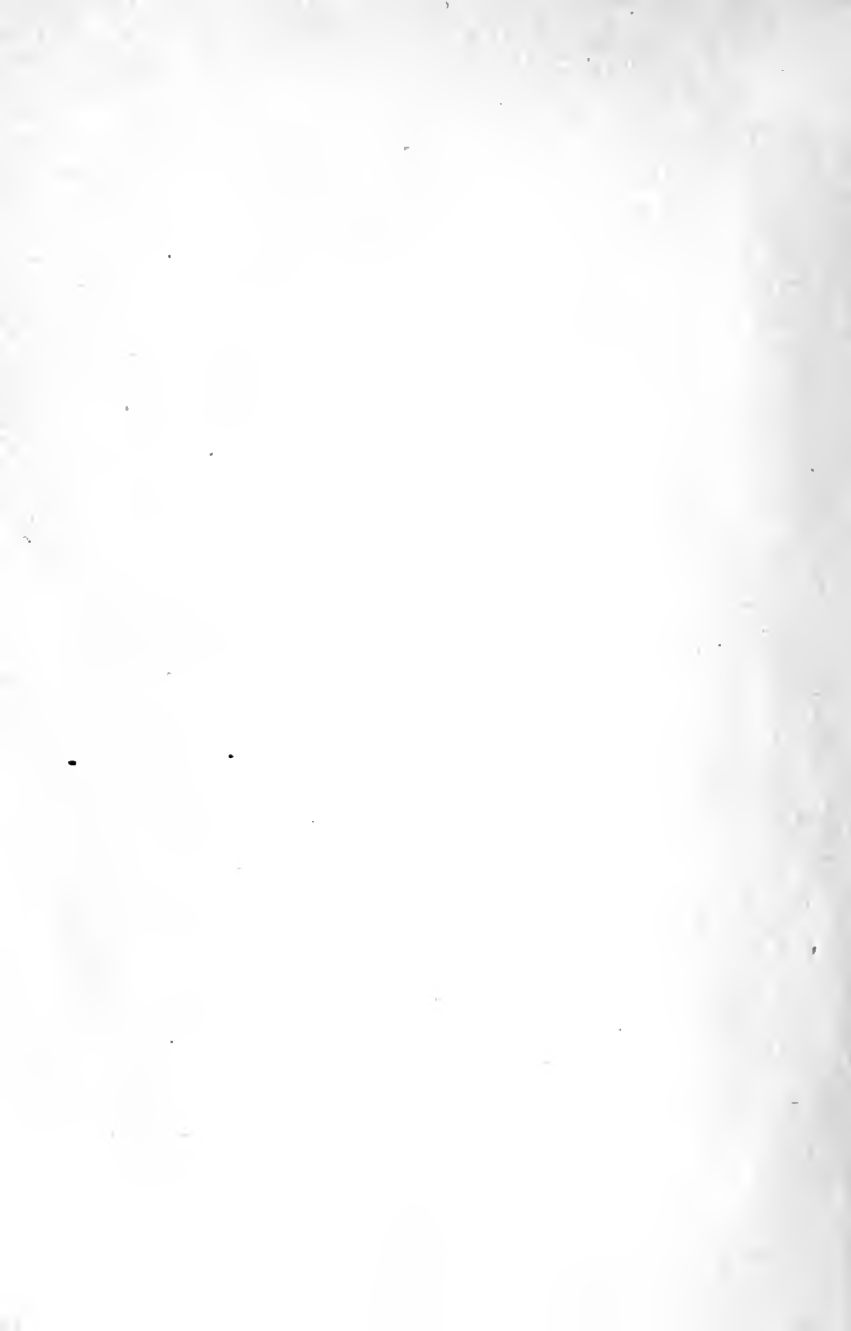


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"We seem fated to meet," I said. "It does look like it," he answered.

A JILT'S JOURNAL

A NOVEL

By "RITA"



"Give me a nook and a book,
And let the proud world spin round."

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A JILT'S JOURNAL

BY "RITA."

A JILT'S JOURNAL

PART I.

The Desire of Knowledge.

CHAPTER I.

It was something one of the girls said yesterday, when we were in the Swedish gymnasium, that made me do it.

"Some people scribble with their pens, but you, Paula, scribble with your mind," was her remark.

"What do you mean?" I made answer.

"You are always presenting things to yourself in the light of an event. You don't accept a plain fact; you must embroider it. I believe everything that happens is a story to you. You act in it, and live in it, and imagine all sorts of extra things about it—things that don't really happen, except in your own mind. 'He said,' and 'she said,' and 'he answered,' is always going on within you. You're the sort of girl who ought to write a book, or go on the stage. You're bound to *do* something."

"My mother wrote books," I said thoughtfully.

"Perhaps that accounts for it. Lesley and I were talking about you last night, and we came to the

conclusion that you're too restless to be just the ordinary girl. You're a—a—"

"Personality?" I suggested.

"I suppose that's the word. I mean something that can't be suppressed: that wants to come out and speak, and *live*. You would like to keep a record of your emotions, for the sheer delight of seeing them written down."

Claire le Creux was eighteen, and was leaving school. I was a year younger, but my education was finished also. At least I had received an intimation from my guardian, who was also my uncle, that I was to return to him at the expiration of this Christmas term.

We elder girls were arranging the gymnasium for the breaking-up party, which great event was to take place that evening. The long room was decorated with ivy and holly; the poles and swings and bars were put away, or fastened back. Rows of chairs had been placed for expected visitors, and on the impromptu stage at the end of the room a last rehearsal of a fairy scene was going on. The younger children were solemnly pirouetting in obedience to directions from the dancing mistress. The French governess was assisting us in the decorations. A flock of girls were perpetually flitting through the room, hindering or helping, according to their mood.

I, Paula Trent, Claire le Creux, and my special friend, Lesley Heath, were sufficiently apart from the crowd for conversation. The conversation I have described, the chance words that suddenly seemed to throw a side-light upon the odd and changeful and supremely discontented self which I had dignified as a "personality."

As a rule schoolgirls are not supposed to think of themselves individually so much as of the life and duties and routine by which their lives are bounded. They are so much part of a system that they must forget, or ignore, their own small place in the vast community. Only a great gift, a great loneliness, or a great sorrow lifts them into a separate sphere of existence. A place where routine is *not*; where thought claims creative force, and where "I—the Individual"—becomes a creature of importance.

To myself I had long been "I—the Individual." Claire's words only illuminated what I had kept in the background of my own thoughts.

She was the star of our scholastic firmament, the brightest, cleverest, most accomplished of all the accomplished pupils turned out of this mill of learning. She had taken more prizes, passed more examinations, won more honors than any of the girls. And she and I and Lesley Heath were leaving at the same time, after many terms of school friendship. Lesley was a general favorite—I was not. I do not intend to convey that I was unpopular. Far from it. But my tastes were exclusive, and my tongue had a trick of sharpness. It offended oftener than it flattered, and plain-speaking, even if veiled by irony, is not beloved of schoolgirls. Claire was the supreme favorite. I had been spasmodically jealous of her friendship for Lesley, but, having proved it less devoted than my own, was content to rank myself first in that coveted affection.

We stood as "The Three," in schoolgirl parlance. A trio of united excellence in point of conduct, gifts, and credit to the establishment.

Claire came first, Lesley second and I—third. I could have taken place in the first rank had I so

chosen, but I had a knack of starting at a gallop and then coming in at a walk. I grew tired of things so quickly, even of endeavor. I saw myself attaining so much in fancy that I allowed myself to fail in fact. What I felt I *could* do ceased to be worthy the effort of accomplishment.

That sentence of Claire's—"You scribble with your mind"—sums up very accurately my peculiarity. I was always living scenes and situations in a mental atmosphere that held me aloof and absorbed. My mind was filled with imaginary friends I might have loved, imaginary deeds I might have done, imaginary speeches I might have made. The outer world, the real life I lived, could not content me. I wanted a wider stage on which to play, an impossible canvas on which to paint; an infinitude of manuscript would have represented the book I wished to write.

The strangest thoughts came to me and the most impossible dreams. I was badly equipped for life, but I panted to set foot on its pathway of freedom. Anything seemed freedom that was unbounded by school walls and school discipline. I did not speak of my feelings, even to Lesley. It flattered me therefore to feel I had interested her sufficiently for discussion.

And such a discussion! It gave me a new importance in my own eyes. It set my queer mind scribbling afresh.

Even throughout that evening, the recitations, the piano playing, the fairy tableaux, the general "showing-off" to delighted parents, critical elder sisters, scoffing brothers and cousins, I was living a description of it all. Putting it into shape, laughing at the puppets, and criticising the show.

My own performance was sufficiently meritorious to win applause. But I had no parents to delight, no relatives to admire me; no friends to fill the benches, and give pleased attention to my part in the programme.

We ended up with a dance. I had partners of all ages and sizes and incompetence. My toes suffered severely. A stolid, awkward, but persevering youth persisted in requesting the favor of my hand. I grew exasperated. I loved dancing, but my feet ached, and he had trampled my shoes into shapelessness. At his last "May I have the pleasure?" my tongue forgot conventionality, and I answered, "You may have the pleasure, but I have had the pain."

He grew red, stared stupidly at me, and then walked off.

Lesley laughed softly. She had overheard.

"If you are as truthful with future partners in the ballroom as with that poor youth, I pity them," she said.

But I sat out the dance, and nursed my injured foot, and felt thankful for a space of untrampled peace.

The evening was over at last. The day pupils had all departed, cloaked and hatted and ecstatic at the prospect of holidays. The boarders were to follow their example next morning. A relaxation on the part of tired governesses brought about the assembling of Lesley, Claire and myself in the bedroom I shared with the former.

It was a momentous occasion, and we felt its gravity. One phase of life had closed for us. We could never again be three schoolgirls interested only in the rivalries and duties of fully occupied

days. We were to stretch our clipped wings at last and soar to the world beyond our safely sheltered nest. We were to be free—if such a thing be possible except in the form of comparison with varying modes of feminine bondage. Free! It had a pleasant sound as we discussed it, brushing out long, silky locks to the rhythm of pleasant speculations.

It was then—that, at the instigation of the others—I decided to keep a journal—a journal which was to be a faithful record of my after life, which, by some method of reasoning, they both declared was certain to be eventful.

“Why—more than yours?” I asked them.

And Claire referred to that speech in the gymnasium. “You are a born scribbler,” she added, “and you will be able to make even commonplace things picturesque.”

“My life at Scarffe will be uneventful enough,” I observed. “My guardian is old and learned, a celebrated archæologist. He has written some wonderful book on the ruined castles of England, and knows more about Norman and Tudor architecture than any other professor. I believe he only settled at Scarffe because there is an old ruin there that dates from the Saxon era. He has been two years investigating it, and has not finished his researches yet.”

“And you will live alone with him?”

“Yes. And the village is as quiet as the deserted one of Goldsmith’s. It only wakes up once a year for the Fair Day. Fancy, they even ring the curfew there!”

“That must be interesting,” said Claire. “Have you all to put out your lights and go to bed at sunset?”

"I believe some of the country folk do."

"What are the people round about you like? The county, I mean."

"I only spent one holiday there. I know nothing of them."

"What?— Not the squire or rector, or doctor! Don't tell me it's quite so God-forsaken."

"Oh, no! There is a title and park in the neighborhood, and some good families, and a rector and curate to look after their souls, and a doctor to take care of their bodies; but my uncle never goes to church, and is never ill, so they leave him severely alone."

"It seems a dull look-out for you, Paula," said Lesley.

"I hope, of your charity, you will come and stay with me sometimes," I answered.

"I will, and carry you off to London in return. You must not be buried alive."

"London! How I should love it!" I exclaimed.

"Perhaps you would not. It is not half so enchanting as its name portends."

"And you, Claire—you go to Paris," I said. "I am the only country mouse, it appears."

"Oh! Paris is to finish me, that's all. I shall come out then. My parents have decided that."

"Come out!" I exclaimed. "How funny that sounds! A female Columbus making discoveries of men, minds, and manners. That is an experience I can't look forward to. My uncle cares nothing for society. I don't suppose I shall ever go to a ball—a real ball; what Claire calls 'come out.'"

"After all, balls aren't absolutely necessary to a first acquaintance with life," said Lesley. "It can be interesting in—other forms."

"But one has to make the interest for oneself instead of having it made."

"You are well adapted for making discoveries, Paula," laughed Claire.

"And interests too," said Lesley. "There may be country swains to conquer, country hearts to subjugate before she tries her powers on the town."

I made a gesture of impatience.

"Why is it," I said, "that a girl's first mission in life is to win the attention of a man, her next to get married to one? It really seems as if we were educated for no other purpose. There's something very horrid about it. We are shut away from men so that they may not be disenchanted with us in our chrysalis stage. Then they spring into life—our life—as possible lovers and husbands. We can make no discoveries about them, and yet the inexperience of girlhood is applied as a test to the weal or woe of our future."

"What a Minerva you are!" laughed Lesley.

"And already occupying her wisdom in the uses of man as applied to schoolgirl enlightenment," said Claire.

"It will have to come," I said. "There's no use shutting our eyes to the fact. And there are two ways of treating the experience. To test, or accept it."

"Which shall you do, Paula?" asked Lesley, her laughing eyes looking at me from a cloud of dusky hair.

"Need you ask her *that?*" said Claire. "Did you ever know Paula accept a thing without question or criticism. She'll carry out the habit, depend on it."

"But you can't treat men as you treat—other things," said Lesley. "How are you to test them

until you know them; and how can you possibly know them until you have passed all the conventional stages, bounded by ballroom conversation, or casual acquaintanceship?"

"I think I shall find a way," I answered.

They looked at me eagerly. "I really believe you will," they said.

And that is how I came to write this journal.

CHAPTER II.

My holidays, with but rare exception, had been spent at school. I was going to a life quite strange and quite different from any previous experience.

I traveled alone, and being Christmas Eve the trains were crowded, slow, and the changes and waits most wearisome. A novel I purchased at the bookstall helped me to pass away the time as well as affording me an insight into certain phases of life and society hitherto unknown and undreamt of. The title was *Friendship*, and had allured me into purchase.

I need hardly say that the sort of friendship I had expected to read about was widely different from the author's ideas on the subject! However, I was too enthralled and delighted to cavil at doubtful morality—surprised also to find that Love, as a passion, or an experience, was not absolutely limited to the unwedded members of society. The beauty of the writing and its style carried me on as by magic, and threw an enchanted haze over all that was harmful. I could find in those pages, however, no manly action in any way appealing to my ideas of the sex. Prince Io seemed to me a weak, vain fool, who never knew his own mind. The commonplace husband of Lady Joan was a hateful person, the other male creatures mere sketches. Naturally my sympathies flowed towards Etoile, the beautiful and wonderful artist, but even she appeared to me what I can only describe as a "book-woman." Her

sorrows didn't appeal, and with all her great genius and wonderful dreams, she certainly never spared expense in the matter of household luxuries, or personal adornment. Such velvet robes, such lace, such jewels, such wealth of hothouse flowers, and fruits, and carriages, and servants!

I came to the conclusion that painting must be a most lucrative profession for a woman.

When it grew too dark to read I closed the book and thought it out. Tried to fathom the supreme art which, even while it repels, exacts one's admiration and one's wonder. To write so that your thoughts seemed actual living things! To take some creature of your fancy and clothe it with mere words—yet make out of those words a flesh and blood covering for the creature. That, indeed, was magical and great and worthy of all praise!

I wished such a power had been mine; and that wish brought back to my memory again those odd words of Claire le Creux, "You scribble with your mind." That was the truth—a scathing one. Scribble—nothing more. She did not designate my ability by any better title, and Claire was a clever girl!

I turned over the leaves of the book with careless, wandering fingers. It was a soiled, second-hand copy, and I had singled it out of a pile marked, "Reduced Prices." I came suddenly upon the title-page and saw written on the blank space between title and publisher's name, two lines in pencil. I held the page close to the window, and in the failing light made out with some difficulty the following words:—

"Yet there is one that comes before the rest,
And there is one that stays when all are gone."

I closed the book, and looking straight before me, met the eyes of a fellow-passenger.

A man—a young man, whom I vaguely remembered entering the train at the last changing place.

"It is too dark to read," he said.

"I am not reading—now," I hastily added.

He smiled. The "now" was so recent.

"How slow the trains are to-day," he went on. "We are more than an hour late."

"Are we?" I said vaguely. It did not matter to me. No one would meet me at the station. No rapturous welcome would be my lot.

"I—I suppose you are going home for the holidays?" he went on.

I drew myself up resentfully. Was schoolgirl written so very obviously on my outward appearance?

"For good," I corrected the bold questioner. "I have left school."

"Oh!" he said. "I believe I am not wrong in addressing you as Miss Trent. I remember you coming home last year. Professor Trent is your guardian?"

"Yes. I don't remember you, though. Do you live here—at Scarffe, I mean?"

"Yes. My father's place is called Woodcote. He is a farmer on a large scale."

"Oh!" I echoed. He looked something superior to my ideas of a farmer's son. "And are you a farmer also?"

"I am," he said, with a twinkle in the depths of his blue eyes that the dull carriage lamp managed to light up for a second. "I used to see you wandering about when I was at work, or driving to market. You looked very lonely. I often wished——"

He paused abruptly, and I felt my face grow suddenly warm.

"Perhaps you'll be offended," he went on, "but I often wished you would come to our place and see my mother and the girls. They're very cheery folk, and I'm sure they'd do their best to brighten the days up a bit. It must be an awfully dull life, although the old gentleman is so clever. Having no young people about, I mean."

"Why should you think my guardian dull?" I inquired. "On the contrary, he is most—entertaining."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I mean in a different way, of course. No jokes, or games, or dances, or that sort of thing. To-night, for instance, we have a dance and a Christmas tree, and all sorts of fun."

"Perhaps," I said somewhat cruelly, "our ideas of fun are different. I don't care for dancing, and I think Christmas trees are only fit for children!"

It was quite untrue, and I don't know why I said it, except that the idea of this young farmer pitying me set all my pride on fire.

He looked disconcerted at my speech, and with an apologetic "I'm sure I beg your pardon," relapsed into silence.

I studied his face furtively under shadow of my hat. It was more interesting than good-looking. Dark, sun-tanned, with an expression of independence and pride; firm lips (now set close together in momentary annoyance at my rebuff); a fine head set on broad shoulders, and eyes whose sunny blue this temporary annoyance could not cloud.

"He does not look like a farmer," I told myself, as the train sped on through the fast-falling dusk.

"I should have taken him for a gentleman had he not told me."

He turned his gaze upon me once more. "We are almost there," he said. "Can I be of any—assistance, about luggage or—or anything? If you have not ordered a cab I'm afraid there'll be a difficulty."

"Oh! I left all that to my uncle," I said. "Usually the porter brings up my luggage, and I walk to the house. It's not far."

"It's raining, though, and very dark," he said. "My trap will be waiting for me. Could I give you a lift?"

"You're very kind. If no one is at the station I shall be glad to accept your offer."

("Give you a lift" sounded homely, and left a measurable distance between us, of which I approved.)

"No kindness at all," he answered; "and half a mile's walk in the rain and darkness can't be much of a treat to a young lady like yourself."

The distance was apparently increasing. My snub had been effectual. One doesn't call one's equal a "young lady"—except in irony of the term!

The train stopped at the insignificant, dirty little station at the foot of the hill—a hill famous in history, as was the ruin that crowned its summit. No one was there to meet me. I had scarcely expected it.

To an individual wrapped in clouds of historical research, and more concerned with dates than living personages, the arrival of a schoolgirl was too insignificant for attention. I stretched my numbed limbs and gathered together such details as traveling bag, rug, and umbrella. Then my new ac-

quaintance helped me out of the carriage, and left me on the platform while he went to look after my box.

He soon returned, and I gave the superannuated porter the usual instructions. Then we went out to the entrance where a smart little trap and spanking chestnut were waiting, held by a rough-looking lad who had driven from the farm.

The owner handed me in. I was still ignorant of his name. The boy clambered up behind, and the chestnut started up the hill at a speed that atoned for long waiting and the attentions of wind and rain. How dreary and desolate the little village looked! The great castle loomed above it like a protecting giant, a shapeless mass against the dull and starless sky. The quaint old inn, deserted in winter, showed a light in its square stone porch. The Market Cross was but a white gleam amidst the queer old houses as we dashed by. The horse's hoofs struck fire from the flint stones of the street, and the rattle of the wheels roused a whirlwind of echoes. The few shops had made festive efforts to signalize the season, but they left a feeling of pity in my mind. Fashion and frivolity were alike out of place at Scarffe.

It is a bit of mediæval history dropped into modern life. As out of place in it as the bicycles of the tourists, and the cheap teas it advertises in its summer season of prosperity. Fortunately it possesses only that season—a brief one at best—and a thing organized by coaching trips, and inquisitive Americans, to whom, apparently, all things connected with English history possess the attraction of non-possession.

The summer season of Scarffe was as yet un-

known to me, but I had heard of it from the professor. I never called him "uncle"; it would have seemed a liberty.

My companion was absolutely silent during that drive. I imagined the chestnut required all his energies. We soon left the village behind (though called a town and dignified as a borough, Scarffe is nothing but *that*); a long, straight road lay between fields, dark and solitary, mere masses of shadow, over which a struggling ray of moonlight fell as the clouds drifted or parted.

My guardian's house was a large, square, ugly building of gray stone, standing back from the road, and surrounded by a thick hedge. Elm and ash trees waved leafless branches in the adjoining grounds; the garden was allowed to run wild at its own sweet will. In the distance, that everlasting feature of the landscape, the castle ruins, towered in broken desolation. It was a dreary-looking place seen under that brooding sky, and my eyes roved over it with little interest. My new acquaintance checked the horse, and the boy came to its head.

"Thank you for your kindness," I murmured somewhat lamely, as my belongings were handed to me. I stood at the gate, which he held open. My arms were full and I had no hand to extend. He lifted his hat, smiled and said, "A pleasure, miss, I assure you," then turned back and sprang into his trap.

"Miss," I repeated, as I marched up the graveled pathway leading to the front door. "Fancy calling me—'miss.' But then he isn't a gentleman."

I rang the bell, and after an interval the door was opened by the old woman who served as house-keeper to my uncle. Mrs. Graddage was her name.

She was a sour old person, with the soul of a Primitive Methodist, and a general belief in the wickedness of all things young and comely. I was no favorite of hers.

I gave my usual greeting as I stepped into the hall, and she surveyed me critically under the hanging oil-lamp.

"You've growed," she announced. "Quite a young woman, I declare——"

Then she commenced a quotation from her favorite Proverbs of Solomon.

"Where's the professor?" I interrupted. "Has he remembered I'm coming home?"

"He's in the study," she said curtly. "Busy."

"Oh! well, I won't disturb him. I'll go to my room. When will tea be ready? I'm tired and cold and hungry."

"Twill be ready at six. You know the master's hours as well as I do. Who drove you from the train? I heard the sound o' wheels."

"A—friend," I said mendaciously. "Apparently everyone here forgot me. I had to depend on a stranger's courtesy, or——"

"I thought 'twas a friend you mentioned," she said, with a sharp glance at my face.

"A friend in need," I answered, beginning to mount the steps. "I do hope you've lit a fire in my room, Graddy?"

She hated me to call her that; so I often did it, to accustom her to the Christian duty of forbearance.

She made no answer, but her stiff skirts rustled aggressively as she retired to her own regions. I mounted the stairs and turned into my usual bedroom. There was a fire crackling and blazing brightly in the grate, and a lamp stood on the table,

shedding a warm glow over the stiffly arranged furniture. A pleasant-looking girl with dark hair and rosy cheeks was drawing down the blind as I entered.

"Welcome home, miss," she said, dropping me a curtsy.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I'm the niece of Aunt Anne Graddage. She's taken me on as parlormaid, now you've come to live here, miss. And I'm to wait on you."

"Oh! is that it? What's your name?"

"Merrieless Hibbs, please, miss, at your service."

I stared. "Merrieless—what a strange name!"

"It is, miss. But being baptized, why it's my name, and I have to be satisfied with it."

"It doesn't suit your appearance at all events," I said, looking at her rosy face and bright, dark eyes. "Merry, without the last syllable, would express you better."

"Just as you please, miss," she answered with another curtsy. "And is there anything I can do for you?"

"You can bring me some warm water, if you will; and I believe there's an old pair of slippers knocking about somewhere that I left behind last holidays. My feet are numbed in these boots."

"They're by the fire, miss. I found them and put them ready in case your box shouldn't arrive with you."

"That shows you've got some sense, Merry," I observed approvingly.

"I'm sure I hope I shall please you, miss," she answered. "I've only had one place, and it was a very hard one. I thought it would be nice to come where a young lady was."

"Oh! I dare say we shall get on," I answered.

Then she left to fetch the can of hot water for which I had asked, and my fancy took a flying leap into the future, and showed me playing the adored mistress to a devoted maid, and various imaginary benefits descending upon her in consequence. At all events she was a novel and pleasant addition to the household, bringing a breath of young life and young interest to vary its monotony.

Between us we might manage to get some fun even out of such unpromising subjects as a professor of archæology and Aunt Anne Graddage.

CHAPTER III.

WITH the first summons of the tea bell I entered what Mrs. Graddage termed the "parlor," and found the professor standing with his back to the fire, his hands thrust under his coat-tails, and his spectacles pushed up from his nose and resting on the ridge of his high forehead.

I went toward him with hand extended. "How do you do, professor?"

His absent-minded glance swept over me. Then he shook hands in a loose and equally absent-minded fashion.

"I am pleased to see you, Paula, and looking so—so well. You have grown—ah—considerably."

He had a way of pausing between words as if searching for one to express an escaping thought.

"I think I have. And you—I—I hope you are quite well?"

"Yes, my dear, I believe so." He looked vaguely round the room. "Never better," he went on suddenly, "never, so to say, ah—better. Will you pour out the tea, my dear? You must need—refreshment after your journey."

"Did you remember that I was to arrive to-night?" I asked, as I seated myself at the table.

It was spread with a homely, and to a schoolgirl eminently satisfactory meal of hot cakes, scones, marmalade, and thick bread and butter. The professor would never eat a thin-cut, as introduced by the fashion of afternoon teas.

"Remember? Of course I did. I—ah—told Mrs. Graddage."

"You sent no one to meet me. It was dark and rainy, and the train was nearly an hour late. However, one of the farmers in the neighborhood gave me a lift in his cart. It was very kind of him—but I quite forgot to ask his name."

He ruffled up his scanty gray hair and surveyed me with that perplexed air that I always managed to arouse in him.

"A—ah—farmer, you say? I regret you have been so inconvenienced. It slipped my memory; the fact that you would expect to be met by a—ah—conveyance. I trust you arrived—safely."

"I suppose I did, seeing that I am here," I answered. But I knew of old that to attempt to wake a sense of humor, even at his own oddities, in the professor was a hopeless task.

He drank his tea and commenced on the thick bread and butter with an expression of absent-minded content. I followed his example as far as the food and the content were concerned. Our meals were usually signalized by silent enjoyment.

"Have you made any new discoveries about the castle?" I asked at last.

His face lightened to animation. "Yes," he said. "Oh! yes. I have traced the herring-bone masonry to its origin, in fact as far as A.D. 690. The keep was built in 1075, as you know. The great dispute, of course, has been the discrepancy of dates connecting the abbey and the castle in history. I have never believed that the latter was built by a Saxon king. Quinton Lacy was once a royal manor and its bounds included the land and the hill whereon the castle stands. The abbey possessed the hill and held

it till after the Norman Conquest. That doesn't agree with the story of the martyr to whom the church here is dedicated. In fact, the history of the castle has been overladen with fiction, and kept up by romance. I have been involved in many disputes concerning the authenticity of—ah—its records. But I maintain my point, and I—ah—shall prove it."

This information did not interest me at all. My life seemed to flash out of a mass of dusty historical records as a fresh piece of martyrdom connected with Scarffe and its castle.

I knew, however, that when my uncle was once started on his hobby nothing would stop him, so I let him ramble on while I turned my attention to the home-made scones and marmalade. When my appetite was appeased I gave my thoughts up to the consideration of myself in new surroundings and amidst a life that offered the sharpest possible contrast to that of my school days. Was there any important part here for me to play? Any rôle that would place Paula as centre of dramatic results?

It looked highly improbable.

This strange old man, wrapped in his researches, whose whole existence was bound up with dates and parchments and the architecture of stones, what could he be to me save the shadow of all the protective kindness that makes of that word home an idyl and a sanctuary?

For me the word held naught of love, and but scant idealism.

I moved, a lonely unit, among its manifold meanings, and grasped none. There was no one to please; no one to care what I did, or left undone. No one to question of school days and their import, no one

to heed what youth might dream or seek amidst the undiscovered treasures of the future.

A gentle melancholy stole over me.

By the time the professor had prosed himself into a renewed interest with the work he was compiling, I had played the part of the martyred, the neglected, the misunderstood. I had seen my young life gliding away under the shadows of that ancient castle; I had wandered, a lonely girl, a lonely woman, under its unchanging aspect. Nothing of girlhood's mirth and light-heartedness was to be my portion. Even romance shrank aside and left me gazing listlessly after that "sweet hand-in-hand" companionship of moving figures that grouped themselves in the roseate foreground of illusions I should never know.

The professor's voice aroused me from my trance. He had pushed back his chair, and was looking at me.

"If you will excuse me, Paula, I—ah—have some work to do in my study.

The old formula. I had heard it so often. I should hear it so often still. I sighed and rose also.

"Of course, professor. Do not let me make any difference to your usual habits."

Then I went up to my own room and unpacked my box, and began a letter to Lesley.

I had scarcely got beyond the first page when I was interrupted by a knock at the door, and on my answer the girl Merrieless entered.

I laid down my pen and looked inquiry.

"If you please, miss, aunt sent me to see if you wanted anything, and help——" Her eyes fell on the emptied box. "Oh, you've done it all yourself, miss!"

"Yes," I said. "There wasn't much to do."

She glanced at my plain serge frock, and then at me, and then at the wardrobe.

"But there will be, miss," she said cheerfully. "By-and-by when you're going to parties and balls and such like, same as Lawyer Triggs' daughters— young ladies, I mean—used to go where I lived before. A beautiful young lady, miss, like you, won't be moping yourself to death here. And it will be such a pleasure to help dress you, and see you go off in your satins and pearls, and——"

I laughed aloud.

"What *are* you talking about, Merry?" I exclaimed. "There's as much probability of my going out to balls and parties, and wearing satins and pearls as—as of your doing it."

Her bright face fell. "Oh, miss, is that true? I can't believe it. Young ladies always——"

"Young ladies," I interrupted, "who have homes, and mothers and fathers to look after them; but I, Merry, have none."

"No more than myself, miss," she said sympathizingly.

"Come, sit down here and let us have a talk," I said. "We're both young, and though I'm mistress, and you are maid, youth stands for much. Tell me your history, Merry? And I—well, there's nothing to tell you about myself except that I'm an orphan, and have just left school, and must spend the rest of my life *here*."

She sat down as I bade her, and her large, bright eyes wandered over me with flattering approval.

"It won't be for ever, miss," she said cheerfully. "Nor very long, perhaps. You'll be getting mar-

ried—pardon my freedom in saying it—and to some fine-spoken, rich, handsome gentleman.”

“Nonsense,” I said, frowning. “Marriage is a very important thing, Merry. It means something more than fine speeches, or looks, or even riches.”

“Love, of course, miss,” she said apologetically. “But there’s no fear o’ that not coming your way.”

I looked at her with a little sense of wonder.

In every grade of life the same thought seemed to meet the woman on the threshold. Love, marriage. The girls at school had discussed them as the all-important factors in our future. This uneducated serving maid was eager to do the same. I found myself evading a disquieting truth, and angered because it so persistently faced me. Surely there must be many other things beside just—Love.

Why was it ranked so high, why supposed to play so large a part in the existence of men and women?

Then a faint curiosity crept into my mind. I looked at Merrieless.

“How old are you?”

“I’ll be twenty next birthday, miss,” she said.

Twenty! Surely, with three years’ start of me in the shape of experience, she might have some personal knowledge of this great mystery. I would rather believe a person than a book, and *Friendship* was the first novel of modern life I had read.

“And have you,” I asked diffidently, “had any sort of experience about—love?”

“I’ve felt it, miss,” she answered bashfully, “more than once. Not in such gifted language, so to say, as you put it, but with a twinge *here*, miss, and a deal o’ misery.”

Here evidently represented the region of her

heart, as a large red hand displayed itself like a plaster over the bosom of her neat, black gown.

I felt interested. "More than once," I repeated. "But I thought——"

"Ah! miss, don't you go after what them silly folks in the story books says. You may get it, and suffer for it, but you don't die of it."

That was consoling. My interest grew apace.

"And what was it like, Merry," I asked, "the first time?"

"The first time," she said with another blush, "was the last also, miss, with me."

I felt puzzled. "But I thought you said 'more than once,' Merry?"

"So I did, miss, and so I meant it. 'Twas this way. Love—as a *new* sort o' feeling—that come first. 'Twas the brightest. It didn't last longer than a quarrel and hasty words, and a parting. Second time 'twas a bashful and who'll-speak-first kind o' business—and then a making-up. Next 'twas the same feelin' redivided, so to say, and we knew better than to believe a fallin' out was a everlasting thing. That was the best, miss, and it's still a-goin' on."

"With the same person, Merry?"

"True for you, miss; and my word on it that the tenderest love o' them all is the love that's redivided, so to say. It's his word, miss, and he's a powerful speaker."

I was silent for a moment. The simple story afforded a wide field for speculation.

"Would you mind telling me," I asked at last, "what the first quarrel was about?"

"A poor thing, miss, and pitiful enough. Jealousy o' another woman, a bit prettier than myself, but not circumspect. 'Twas her powers I feared,

not having them to apply, for fear o' being thought light-meaning."

She clasped her hands tightly together, and the color faded from her rosy face. "My word for it, miss, 'tis a powerful cruel feeling; I'd never counsel anyone to give way to it."

"Is it a case of giving way," I asked, "or can't help it?"

"Perhaps a matter o' both, miss. A watery heat of the mind which boils over and puts out the fire of the heart. 'Tis all confusion then—hissing o' steam and fizzing o' ashes, and then clouds o' blackness—and nothing."

"Nothing!" I echoed.

"Save memories," she said. "Black adders of things popping up their heads when most inconvenient; biting and thrusting out forked tongues till every bit o' you seems pierced and stung and you're mad with the poison."

"Oh, Merry!"

"Just so, miss. I've been through it. I hope you never may."

"So do I, with all my heart," I answered. "But do you mean to say after all this, Merry, that you could believe in love again; go back to the same lover?"

"It's this way, miss. You give up something o' yourself when you love that never can come back to you again. And sooner than lose it, why—you just goes after it."

She said other things, did Merrieless the maid, but nothing that could beat that bit of philosophy. So I wrote it down in my journal, long after she had left me to-night, and solitude, and my own reflections.

After all, expressed in more homely fashion, it only echoed the words scribbled in my book—the chance words that had met me on the threshold of life.

“Yet there is one that comes before the rest.
And there is one that *stays* when all are gone.”

CHAPTER IV.

I soon settled down into the routine of life at Scarffe.

Even Christmas day was much like any other day. Mrs. Graddage proposed a variation in the dinner hour, making it seven o'clock instead of two, and abolishing the nine-o'clock supper, a frugal meal which finished the day, but otherwise there was no difference.

I walked to the old church of Quinton Lacy in the morning for service, and saw my farmer friend and his family in one of the pews. A hale, rosy-cheeked old man, undoubtedly his father, two apple-faced girls, pretty enough in their own dairymaid, plump and smiling fashion, and my friend of the train, wearing black broadcloth as though to the manner born, and looking decidedly handsome, in a manly, assertive fashion.

Just as the service began, a rustle of silks and skirts, and a faint exotic perfume arrested my attention. There appeared in the principal pew, belonging, I had heard, to the county magnate, Lord St. Quinton, a party of men and women who embodied in their appearance that essence of a world beyond and apart from country boorishness, that is a special distinction.

One woman especially attracted me. She had a lovely, impertinent face, eyes blue as a turquoise and hair that shone like burnished gold as the sun

rays fell on it from the window above her head. The service evidently bored her. I have no doubt it was a vastly different thing from that of a fashionable London church. Once or twice I caught her roving glance, and it steadied into a critical observation of myself that made me almost nervous.

I quitted the church before the party from Quinton Court, and gave a somewhat envious glance at the prancing horses and fine liveries of the waiting carriages.

Then I took the road back to Scarffe, passing or being passed by other stragglers going the same way. Once a step halted by my side, the owner giving a half-shy "Good morning—and a merry Christmas to you, Miss Trent," as he passed on. It was my friend of the train again. He was alone, and I wondered why he had parted with his family belongings.

I watched him going along the road at a brisk, even pace, nodding right and left, giving and receiving greetings. Evidently he was well known. I began to feel some curiosity respecting him. I should like to have asked his name. He was evidently quite aware of mine.

Instead of going home I took a short cut across the fields, and went up to the castle hill.

The ruins had long been closed to visitors except by payment, but I proffered my dole and passed in through the massive towers of the gateway. The sun was shining gloriously, the air was keen and exhilarating. The grand old pile, with its shrouding ivy and mellow-tinted stone, looked down serenely on the little, gray roofs below.

I always regarded that castle with a kind of awe. It was so old, so terribly old. It had seen so much,

and suffered such stress of fortune; it held the history of peopled centuries that to me were but school-book records. Men and armies had lived and moved and fought, and loved and died on this same spot where I stood; gazed, as I was gazing, at the quiet fields, and the babbling stream running under its arched stone bridge; held that ruined drawbridge against savage foes; seen dynasties change, and tasted of good and evil fortune. And now they were dead and forgotten, yet the old ruin stood and conquered Time, and spoke in every tower and stone and buttress of those far-off centuries, and the deeds done in them.

Men had known how to work in those days, and had not shirked it. Arrow and axe, and steel and shot, had done their best to destroy this fortress, and failed. Generation after generation had come to gaze at it and wonder. It looked as if generations yet unborn would do the same.

I climbed up the old stone stairway of the dungeon tower, which was my favorite point of view. Here I perched myself, and despite the wind, which has a rare fancy for those heights, I sat gazing down at the magnificent expanse of country lying to east and west.

Few visitors came to the castle in the winter season, and I was surprised to see another figure sauntering through the arch and across the grassy space below my tower.

"It looks remarkably like my farmer friend," I thought, and felt vexed at the thought.

Presently I heard steps coming up the stone stairs, mounting higher, approaching nearer, until a sudden exclamation forced me to look round.

"We seem fated to meet," I said.

He took off his soft felt hat ceremoniously. "It does look like it," he answered. "I should never have dreamt that a young lady would choose a lonely place like this to come to."

"I like lonely places," I said. "Apparently you do the same."

"Oh, I often come here when I've leisure. I love every stone of the old place," he added almost reverently.

"How speech lends itself to exaggeration," I said flippantly. "Do you mean *every* stone?"

He looked at me—a puzzled gaze that seemed to ask whether I was mocking what was a serious matter to himself.

"I mean—I just love it all, ruin or no ruin. These stones have a history for me. I know the names of ward and keep and tower, as well as I know the look of the skies above them. You see," he went on apologetically, "I was born and bred under shadow of the castle. There seems no time to me when I didn't look up at this hill and see sunshine, or rain, smite, or clouds enfold it. Every aspect is as familiar as the signs of the seasons. It says 'home' to me when I travel the country round and catch sight of it—so true and strong, standing between the hills that have known it nigh on eight hundred years. It seemed hard to believe at first, but now—well, it's told me so much of itself that there's nothing too wonderful for me to credit."

"You are as great an enthusiast as the professor," I said carelessly. "It strikes me I shall have a surfeit of the castle ruins before I have done with Scarffe."

"The professor; you mean your uncle, the old gentleman who is always exploring around here?"

I laughed slightly. "He is a great and learned authority on architecture and everything belonging to it," I said. "He knows more about the celebrated and uncelebrated ruins of England than any other archæologist."

"So I have heard," he answered. "But I often think that to know too much of a subject is to lose all sense of its charm. For my part, I would rather keep the romance of the castle unimpaired than make researches which throw doubt or discredit on the old stories."

I looked at him with unqualified surprise. I had not expected to hear a farmer's son talk like this.

"Do you know the professor at all?" I asked.

"We have spoken odd times. But I think he is an old gentleman who very quickly forgets faces."

Again I laughed. "I doubt if he ever sees them, except in some inward fashion. His eyes always look as if he were classifying inanimate objects. A dress represents a woman, and a coat and a pair of—I mean hat, represents a man, and that's about all."

It was his turn to laugh now. "That's a very good description," he said. "But—may I ask, Miss Trent, are you not cold sitting there? The position is exposed, and when the wind blows anywhere it never fails to give this hill a turn."

I was cold, and not sorry to dismount from my perch. We descended the stairway, and then came to a pause under the shelter of the King's Tower. Here it was delightfully warm and snug, and my new acquaintance seemed to take my acceptance of his company for granted.

"How did your party go off?" I asked him.

"Party?"

"Last night. The Christmas tree and the dance you told me about."

"Oh, I believe 'twas greatly enjoyed, but I didn't see much of it."

"How is that?"

"Something spoiled it for me," he said, slowly, "and I got thinking."

I should like to have asked him about the subject of his thoughts, but my ignorance of class-habits or class-prejudices kept me silent.

He began to tell me about my neighbors, both here and at Quinton Lacy. Of himself, his school-days, and his family. He spoke well and sensibly. When animated his face brightened and grew almost handsome. He awoke considerable interest in my mind, though behind it all that curious vanity of mine was asking what sort of interest I had aroused in his.

I had no desire to play the mere ordinary girl talking to the mere ordinary young man. I hoped I had dropped school-missishness, but I was not certain.

"You will soon be knowing the great folk at Quinton Court," he said presently. "Then it won't be so dull for you."

"Yes, I suppose they'll call," I answered, all the more confidently because I had supposed nothing of the sort till his suggestion. "My uncle is not rich," I went on, "but I believe he is quite well known in the scientific world. He goes to London every year."

"He will be taking you with him next time?"

"I hope so. My greatest friend lives in London. She has invited me to stay with her when I go there."

"I know London," he said.

"You!"

I could not help a genuine feeling of astonishment.

"Why not? We all travel cityward nowadays. Too many, I often think. The depopulation of the country is its greatest danger. All its youth and strength and blood pour themselves into that great seething vat of the towns, to gain wealth at any sacrifice."

His gaze rested lovingly on the dark, low-lying fields and brooding hills, then swept upward to the stately ruin that seemed always guarding them in overshadowing might.

He appeared to have forgotten me for the time. I recalled his wandering attention.

"Wealth is a good thing," I said. "It is the greatest power of life. You can do anything if you are only rich enough."

"Can you?" he said gravely. "Anything? I think not. Wealth can't purchase happiness or health, or the love of a single human heart. And nothing in life is better than love, Miss Trent."

Again that same assertion, this time from a man's lips. With a view of getting at both sides of the question, I settled myself comfortably into my warm niche and prepared for controversy. I could hardly ask him directly what I had asked Merrieless, so I tried strategy.

"You say *that* as if you had found it out for yourself. Are you married?"

"I!"—— The color mounted to his forehead. "Oh, no! I haven't so much as thought about it—yet."

"Then, perhaps, you're what they call 'keeping company'?"

The flush faded, and his lips set themselves tightly, as I had noticed they could do. His voice held a defiant respectfulness.

"That's foolish sort of talk," he said; "and, though I'm yeoman born and bred, I don't make myself cheap as farm-hands do. I've read a great deal, and thought more; the sort of thought that comes to a man under wide skies, and with the long starlit nights when he lets Nature speak to him. It's wonderful what she can teach." His voice softened, those blue eyes went again to ruined tower and ivied keep. "And she tells no lies," he added. "Books do and men, aye—and women, too. But not Nature; never Nature. She's the grandest book of Truth ever written, and 'tis the finger of God that has touched her pages."

I was silent. A sort of pent-up force within him seemed to have burst into words, and they were words with a new meaning for me.

My fancy went off on one of its usual canters, but this time it was racing through a field of speculation. Nature—he was a son of Nature's breeding. A son of the soil, with the blood of toiling ancestry in his veins. Yet, beside him, I felt suddenly insignificant. All my book-learning, all my smattering of languages, 'ologies and accomplishments were suddenly dwarfed. He towered beside my puny complacency by right of a simple nature speaking out Life's simple truth. And to him also that truth was Love, with its strength and self-sacrifice, and divine power.

So little—yet so much.

I longed to ask him had he realized all this? If to him—as to that simple country maid—love had taught more "than them silly story books say." But

I could not do it. There was something in his face that silenced idle curiosity. The embarrassment of sexual difference, hitherto unknown, held my glib tongue abashed and dumb.

He spoke presently. He was the farmer again.

"Your pardon, miss. I don't know what made me speak so. It's not young lady's sort of talk. But when a man gets thinking——"

"I know," I said quietly. "It's a comfort to speak it out."

"That's just it. But——"

His doubtful glance amused me. "Oh! even school-girls think," I said.

"It takes the soreness from the heart like sunshine after rain," he went on. "Only the sunshine never warms you unless it's——"

"Comprehensive?" I asked.

"The very word. You've a clever brain, young as you look."

"Seventeen," I said with dignity.

His smile was indulgent. "And I am twenty-seven. A wide bit of difference, miss."

"I wish you wouldn't call me *that*," I said pettishly.

"It comes, with a way you have of putting me in my place," he apologized. "I hope I don't forget it. But—although a farmer's son, I'm well educated, and fairly well read, and not altogether concerned with ploughing, and sowing, and breeding cattle."

"Farming must be rather tiring work?"

"I like it in its place and season," he said quietly.

"From year's end to year's beginning?"

"There's waiting times between."

"And then?"

"One thinks," he said, "and dreams."

Then my Paul Pry bestirred itself.

"What do you dream about?" I asked softly.

His glance turned to the massive heights, over which the blue sky bent and smiled.

"The deeds done *there*," he said. "The courage that made the land what it is to-day."

"And never," I asked, "of the fair ladies who lived here also, and inspired that courage?"

"Sometimes," he said. "But, though the same courage beats in men's hearts to-day, I often think the power to inspire it has passed from the fair ladies' hands."

"Why?"

"I told you I had known something of the life of cities."

"But they hold the very pearl of womanhood. All that is cultured, and brilliant, and beautiful——"

"And vile," he said curtly. "I beg your pardon, I shouldn't have said that. Such things won't come your way. You're but a flower now, and you think only of the sun that will ripen your bloom, not of the rain and the wind that can smite it to the dust—to the dust," he echoed vaguely, "as I've seen women's beauty smitten."

I thought of Prince Io and Lady Joan, and Etoile broken-hearted in her lonely Roman palace. Was this a phase of life—the life of cities; of the great world, of womanhood, to which a girl's dreams are the prelude?

His voice recalled me. It was once more apologetic.

"I'm sure I don't know why. I talk to you so freely. It's not often my way with folk; maidens especially."

The quaint term pleased me.

"I like to hear you," I said. "I hope you will always talk to me as if you knew I—understood."

"There's no doubt o' that," he said, "no doubt whatever. But perhaps you'll be thinking it a liberty on my part when you're gone away, or grown up."

"I wish," I said, "you wouldn't treat me as if I were so very young. I assure you I feel quite grown up enough."

"Only seventeen," he muttered absently, "and twenty-seven. Seventeen from twenty-seven and ten remains. And what a deal of experience one can gather into ten years!"

"I wonder," I said suddenly, "if I shall be back *here* in another ten years' time, and my experience gathered?"

"May it be a good one, a bright one," he said fervently. "For you've the face to draw men's hearts to you, and the tongue to win them, and it's not always a safe power, miss, nor wisely used."

"I wish you'd tell me your name," I said abruptly. "I'd like to know it."

"I thought you did. It's well known here, father and son for generations past. Herivale it is, miss—Adam Herivale at your service."

"At *my* service?" I echoed, fancy playing once more with the literal meaning of words grown meaningless through centuries of formal usage. "Suppose I should ever claim such service, Mr. Adam Herivale?"

"It will be yours," he said simply. "And not 'Mr.' if you please, Miss Trent, but only plain Adam Herivale—yeoman born, as I said before—

who is your servant and faithful friend if you will so honor him."

I looked up quickly at the earnest face, the deep blue eyes, full of steadfast purpose. A man to trust undoubtedly—to trust, and reverence and believe in.

Quite involuntarily I stretched out my hand. He took it, and a pleased smile parted his lips.

"And now I must go home—Adam Herivale," I said.

CHAPTER V.

MERRY brought me some tea to my bedroom at five o'clock, and found me writing.

I pushed the papers aside, glad to have some one to talk to.

"Oh, what a long day!" I said, "and two hours still to dinner."

"I suppose it is terrible lonesome, miss," she said sympathizingly, as she drew a dwarf table up to the fire and then placed the tray upon it. "But you went to church, and had a longish bit o' walking. Didn't that pass the time?"

"Oh! yes. I was up at the castle."

"'Tis all the place seemingly, miss. One never loses sight o' it anywheres. Wonderful old it is they do say! I didn't believe Aunt Anne Graddage when she told me first that it was there time o' the ancient Britons and Norming Conquists. But every one I know here says the same, even Gregory Blox."

"Who is Gregory Blox?" I asked.

"Him as I told you about, miss."

"Oh! And does he live here, in the neighborhood?"

"At Woodcote Farm, miss; Farmer Herivale's place near Quinton Lacy. Mostly called Herivale's."

I grew interested.

"You can wait till I have finished my tea," I said;

"and tell me about—Gregory and the farm. What does he do?"

"Helps with the cattle, and field work summer-time, miss. His father's an ancient man, and has been on the Herivale's farm nigh upon sixty years, and they took on Gregory to oblige. 'Twasn't the trade he wanted. He's a blacksmith by nat'ral inclination. 'Twas part filial duty as brought him back here, his father being a widower, but with a taste for young maidens that seems a unnat'ral thing in an old man. So Gregory came to see as he didn't get into harm. A healthful stretch o' the mind, miss, toward woman-folk is all very well in the prime o' manhood, but 'tis vile in the ancient, and so Gregory told him."

I began to think I should like to make acquaintance with this merry old gentleman who had so epicurean a taste at three score and ten.

"Tell me some more," I said, pouring out a fresh cup of tea. "And do sit down; you look so uncomfortable standing there."

"Thank you, miss, and excuse the liberty. But as to more, there's not much o' that to be told. The old gentleman doesn't look favoringly on me since I boxed his ears for trying to snatch a kiss behind the wash-house door one time I had been to the farm on an errand. I had no thought about it but to teach him a lesson. Maybe he didn't care for learning it."

I laughed unrestrainedly.

"Did he tell Gregory?"

"No, miss, but I did; and it made things a bit unpleasant for the ancient man. Gregory called him a old carrion crow, forever sniffing after young flesh, and the old gentleman didn't like it."

"Has he behaved better since?" I asked.

"To me, miss? Well, I haven't given him much chance for disrespectfulness, and Gregory meets me in the village winter times, when we go for a company walk. But I doubt he'll be at his frisky ways again come spring. He was always powerful taken up wi' women, was Gregory's father."

"I hope the son doesn't take after him?"

"'Twas my suspicioning him of that roguery, miss, that led to the quarrel I explained to you yester night; but he had no thoughts o' light-mindedness—the Lord forgive me for the doubt. 'Tis a great thing to be well loved by a respectful man, miss."

"It must be," I said gravely. "Has Gregory no brothers and sisters?"

"Not that's known on, miss, acknowledgably. But what's been done by that ancient piece o' backsliding is not for a modest girl to speak of."

"Oh!" I murmured uncomfortably, feeling I was upon too delicate ground. "What a funny old person he must be. I should like to see him."

"No trouble about that, miss. Any day you like to go to Herivale's, old Gregory is sure to be about, or any one would show him to you. He's not much to look at, save in the way o' waistcoats, having a fancy for them long from top button downward; nigh to his knees they mostly come. He says 'tis a worshipful high fashion, and points a distinction. But have a care o' yourself, miss, for if his mood be lively there's no sayin' what sly and untimely things he mayn't be sayin'."

This did, indeed, promise interest. I resolved to pay a visit to the ancient Gregory at the earliest opportunity.

"Tell me," I said, "do you know the names of any of the people staying at the Court? There was such a pretty lady with their party at church. I should like to know who she is."

"I don't know any names, miss. Only that they've a heap o' visitors for Christmas week, and wonderful gay doings. The servants there come to Herivale's farm oftentimes for cream and butter and such-like, though they've dairy, and poultry yards, and all such things o' their own. That's how the talk gets round, miss, from one to the other. Man to maid, and Gregory, he tell me. I had a chance of getting service there, as extra help in kitchen work, but aunt wanted me here. I'm glad now I came."

"So am I," I said heartily.

"There's no manner o' reason, miss, why you shouldn't be of the company up to the Court," she went on. "Lord St. Quinton calls here to see your uncle; Aunt Graddage says so, and I'm sure if he and her ladyship knew such a pretty young lady as yourself was so lonesome-like, they'd be having you off in an eye-twinkling. Perhaps 'twill come about. They do think the old gentleman a powerful clever man. And though he lives so plain-like, and not a satin couch, or a picture frame to be seen in the drawing-room, I'm told no one takes count o' that when you're clever."

"Certainly this house is very ugly, and hideously furnished," I said. "But I fancy the professor isn't very well off, and he doesn't notice things either."

"If they was brought before him by a forcible word o' argument, miss?" she suggested.

"What would Aunt Anne Graddage say at inno-

vations?" I said, with a laugh. "And she rules here, Merry."

"True, miss; and she's the powerful strong mind of her own, has aunt. Still, you might get round her."

"I think I'll wait for the satin couches and picture frames, Merry. After all one can live very comfortably without grandeur."

"Yes, miss," she assented cheerfully. "And it's not as if we was a noble family, though well-born I make no mistake, but not of these parts, are you, miss?"

"No. My uncle only came here to make researches about the old ruins. He is from quite a different county."

"That's as how I've been told it is, miss."

"Do people take such an interest in us?"

"Strangers coming to a place like this, miss, is as good as a peep-show. There's not a soul so old, or so wearied out, as don't prick ears and cackle news, be it false or true, 'bout newcomers. And the old gentleman always a-going about with his camp stool and his little hammers, and his measuring rods, 'tis but nat'ral he's set up as a wonderment."

"Shall I be a wonderment too, Merry?"

"With that face, and that hair, and the carriage o' your body so straight and limmer, do you ask it, miss? Of course your gowns are a bit plain, but there's more in a gown than the stuff; there's the way o' wearin' it, and that you've got. And makin' so bold, shall I put out a dress for to-night, being a festival day, miss, and late fashionable dinner?"

"Do you suppose the professor would notice what I had on?"

"'Tis a shame to be truthful on the point, but

I've never so much as seen him give a comprehending look to a female, miss."

"Not like the ancient Gregory, Merry?"

"A deal better in his morals, miss, though less cheerful in his mind."

"Well, put me out my school-party frock, Merry. I wish you could dress my hair. I'd make you my maid, and Graddy could get somebody else for housework."

Merry shook her head gravely. "She'd never consent. She thinks a lot o' servants means only a lot o' work and waste. 'Tis a weary, easy place this, once the morning time is over. I'm good at plain sewing, miss, and will do all yours, but about hair-dressing—that's something in the extra way, and would want an art of education."

So I did my own hair, and put on my white frock, and fastened a bunch of holly berries at my waist.

But whatever sort of picture I made, or seemed to make, there was no one to notice or approve, for the professor's eyes were turned inward as usual, and I doubt if he even knew there was a plum pudding on the table.

"I was up at the castle to-day," I said, making a valiant effort at conversation, which had spluttered and died out like damp wood newly kindled, during previous stages of soup and roast beef, served and carved by Graddage.

He looked up from his plate, where a slice of plum pudding had aroused a speculative regard worthy of an archæological specimen. "I hope," he said, "you observed that masonry of which I was speaking. It is worthy of study."

"But I'm not writing a history of ruins," I said.

"That, Paula, need not prevent you taking an intelligent interest in the subject."

"I don't care about it as a subject," I said. "If I were an artist I'd paint the old castle, because it is beautiful and picturesque, but I can't get up any enthusiasm over the architecture of one era as distinct from another."

His eyes regarded me now instead of the pudding.

"You are very young," he remarked. "And all young female things are indifferent to what lies beyond their own immediate interests."

To be called "a young female thing!" Well?

"I daresay," he went on placidly, "that when you have passed the chrysalis stage you will show more intelligence. I can recommend you a course of study."

"Thank you, professor," I said with dignity. "But I've had ten years of study, and am a little tired of it. I should like a change."

"A change," he repeated. His eyes went from me to his plate, from his plate back to me.

I wondered whether he noticed that I was wearing a white dress, and that my eyes were laughing at his perplexity.

"Yes," I said; "a change from school routine, and books and classes. I am grown up, you know, professor."

If anything so grave and solemn as that face of his could be said to smile, then the professor attempted this frivolity. He pushed up his glasses and drew a wrinkled hand over a perplexed brow.

"Hardly that, my dear," he said. "Seventeen is your age, if I remember right. Your father's instructions were that you should leave school at that

period of life, and live under my guardianship. You are entitled also to receive the sum of one hundred pounds a year from this date. I believe I mentioned these facts in my letter."

"You may have intended to, but I am hearing them for the first time."

"Dear me," he said, "dear me! It was certainly written."

"Perhaps—not posted. That would account for my ignorance."

"So it would, my dear, so it would. I do forget to have letters posted. Perhaps I shall find this on my writing table."

He rose. "Oh, don't go!" I entreated. "You've not finished your dinner. And it will be such a long evening for me."

"As for my dinner," he answered, "I have had all I need. This sort of indigestible, though seasonable, addition to the meal is—ah—unimportant."

"But do you never take a holiday?" I urged. "This is Christmas Day, you know, and—well, everyone enjoys themselves, and rests, and is as merry as circumstances permit. Why should you be different?"

He walked over to the fireplace and stood with his back to it, and his hands thrust behind his long coat tails. I pushed my plate aside, and during the time his silence afforded reflection, I saw myself playing the staff of declining years; the gentle influence who should win him from too-absorbing studies and make of the dreary house a home. Just as his hair had grown to yet more silvered scantiness, and his weak voice was blessing my filial devotion, he broke into speech.

"I suppose I am different," he said. "And I have

forgotten what this place must seem to you. You are — ah — your mother's child, Paula, as well as your father's. I should have remembered that."

"Am I like her in any way? Oh, do tell me!" I cried eagerly. I left the table and came to his side. "Please remember," I went on, "that I'm not a stone or a specimen, but a flesh and blood creature, and very ignorant of life. Perhaps if I knew my mother's it would help me."

Such a change came over the passionless face that I could only look and wonder. The tremor that stirs a quiet pool into whose waters a chance stone has fallen was such a disturbance as wavered over that wrinkled visage, and stirred it from a long-enforced composure.

He looked at me; at the table, with its scarlet and white decoration; at the room and its bare walls; then again at me.

"I forget the years," he said, "and how they pass, and the changes they bring. I forget, ah—everything. But when you speak and look, Paula, she comes back and speaks and looks also. I have been a recluse so long. I—I almost forget what it ever was to have been young. For to-night—Christmas night you said it was, Paula—I will put aside my work as you — ah — counseled. You may, if you choose, accompany me to my study, and I will try and tell you what you desire about those parents you lost so young, and whose place I can so ill supply."

His arms dropped loosely to his side. He led the way to the door, and I followed.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN I came up to my room it was ten o'clock, and I took out my journal to confide to its pages the events of the day. But of that conversation in the study I could not write freely.

It was my first glimpse into a human heart, and the heart had not aged with years as the face had done. Time slipped back as the professor told his story, which was my mother's story also, and painted her for me a bright, gifted, enchanting creature, playing havoc with all hearts. She had Irish blood in her veins, and dawned on the life of two stolid English boys as a revelation of woman's beauty and witchery. They both loved her. One won her love. The other never spoke of his.

That was what I read between the lines. No new story, I suppose, but it was new to me. Perhaps it was the brief words, the long pauses, the very simplicity of speech that made that story so infinitely pathetic. The language of feeling is strong enough to disdain eloquence or exaggeration. I should like to write as the professor spoke, but I know it would be hopeless to attempt it. I made a good listener because I was an intensely interested one. There was no need to act *that* part. I felt it. A hopeless love, unspoken and unguessed. A tragic death, and then a charge whose import and responsibility were alike undreamt of.

I—the personality, evolved out of the situation. My place—here.

But as I thought it all over in the solitude of my

room I felt dwarfed into insignificance. I could only see that patient figure toiling through long years for sake of work, not the work's reward.

And I had laughed at him. A ghost of patient manhood came back from years of cold lovelessness and seemed to reproach youth's heedless judgment. Its sad eyes made my own eyes dim with swift, repentant tears.

Love again faced me with a new mystery—the mystery of self-sacrifice and unrecompensed devotion. Youth, in man and maid, had already spoken, but this time I heard the voice of age telling the same story—the story of Love. That vague dream that yet could take substance and overshadow a whole life.

Strange — doubly, trebly strange. Could one never get away from it?

* * * * *

If I am to be quite true to myself and my promise in this journal, I must hide nothing that comes into my life, shapes or affects it.

But I find myself wondering to-night what the girls would say at the picture of a sentimental Paula, brooding over the picture of a shabbily dressed, wrinkled old man, who has just made a heroic effort to adjust his life to a new condition. Wondering still more what they would say if they knew the history my imagination had created for me out of such scant materials. For I caught a glimpse of myself wielding my mother's power over hearts; hurting, enchanting, wounding or winning them. Would one faithful love outweigh all the rest? Would it be for me a love that I should remember even unto the end of life?

Staying when all "the rest were gone"?

It was a pathetic thought to meet expectant girlhood, for whom the rose should possess no thorn; but I could not have been myself had I not looked at the subject from its pathetic as well as its expectant side. I had made up my mind to be strictly truthful to that self-conscious personality of Paula. Neither good nor bad of her should escape my handling and my criticism, though to others would fall the judgment of both.

I think, to-night, I felt impatient for the curtain to rise, the play to begin. There were not many actors in the performance as yet, and the piece was not at all dramatic, except in possibilities. Friendship, but no enmity—interest, but no passion—sentiment, but no love.

Yet scope for them all.

If only I were not so young and so ignorant! I wish I could find a female mentor to give me some hints or some advice. Walking by oneself is pleasant enough sometimes, but if you are walking in a strange country and don't know the way, or how to read the sign-posts, you may find yourself in an undesirable situation.

Ah! . . . I hear Merry's step. She is coming up to brush my hair. So good-by to my journal for to-night.

* * * * *

I awoke to a cold, crisp December morning, with sunshine streaming on leaf and berry of the glistening holly trees outside my window. Woke—fresh, brisk, alert, as is youth's happy privilege.

On the breakfast table I found a card and brief scrawl from Lesley. It held an inquiry as to myself and my doings. Claire was staying with her till the New Year, then she was to leave for Paris.

"I suppose you are very lonely," she concluded. "Unless you are living in imagination, and making stories out of commonplace things, as you can do. Remember you have promised to tell me *everything*. Have you managed to wake up the professor yet?"

My glance fell on my guardian, who had received some scientific pamphlet by the same post and was turning over its pages.

I laid down my letter. "Your tea is getting cold," I observed. "Shall I pour you out another cup—hot?"

"Thank you, my dear, if you will," he said. "I have had my meals alone so long that I forget you are here."

I took the cup and threw away its chilled contents and handed it back replenished. "Are you going out this morning?" I then asked. "It will be lovely up on the castle heights in this bright sunshine."

He shook his head. "I have some work to do. I fear I cannot spare the time."

"You seem to be always working," I said. "Are you writing another book?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Isn't it tiresome writing so much?"

"It is my life—now. I have to give the world the fruit of my discoveries. It is expected of me."

"That's what's meant by making a name, isn't it?" I inquired.

"I suppose so," he said.

"By the way!" I exclaimed, "didn't my mother write books? You told me so once. Have you any of hers? I should love to read them."

His lips twitched nervously. "She wrote—ah! yes. One book was published. I have it my book-case."

"Only one!" I echoed disappointedly. "That seems very little. What is the name of it?"

"*Fenella's Confessions*," he answered.

"What a funny title! Who was Fenella?"

"I think she is meant for the heroine. But you can read it for yourself. If you will come to the study presently I will—ah—show it to you."

My curiosity was aroused.

"Did you ever read it, professor?—or was it too frivolous?"

"I—yes, I read it, although novel-reading is not a habit of mine. But she asked me to do so."

When I held the book in my hands shortly afterward, and turned over the pages with reverent fingers, I saw that many passages were marked with pencil lines, that here and there a word was blistered almost out of recognition. I thought of his simple words—"She asked me to read it."

The obedience had cost something, if only a heartache at the quickening of memory.

"May I take it away and read it, professor?" I asked.

"Yes, my dear. It is only right you should know her through her writing. But—be very careful of that volume, Paula. It is all I have of hers; and she gave it to me."

I promised, and then left the room, carrying with me once more the picture of a patient face bent over piles of paper—a stooping figure on which Time's hand had laid a heavy burden, uncomplainingly borne.

But the sunshine was to me an invitation from the outer world. I put on my hat and jacket, and with the book in my hand went out to it. As usual my steps turned toward the castle hill. I found a

sheltered spot, and sat down on one of the fallen bits of masonry, and then I opened the dull brown cover. I looked at the title-page and the name of the author. Suddenly a great wave of sadness swept over me, and I felt the tears rush to my eyes. For I thought of the hand that had penned those words, and of the brain that had spoken in these pages, and remembered that life was quenched in both.

Only a great silence had represented her to me until I held this volume and began to make acquaintance with her through its printed pages. I read them as no one else could read them; as interpreters of the dead. The only thing that could speak to me of all that one word "motherhood" meant. I read the story uncritically, for how could I question power or plot, style or diction, when my throbbing heart sought only that hint of self-revelation which should make me cry out, "I know you"?

Then presently I forgot the story. It was tragic, but it was not hers. I sought through the pages for all the marked passages. He had known her, he would have understood what they spoke of herself, and to them I applied for interpretation.

I copy a few here, for reference, as I had promised to return the book.

"One love in a life. How poverty-stricken you would make it! I have loved three men—in different ways. Now I begin to think I loved none, for a fourth appears on the scene, making up in himself what the others lacked, each in one particular."

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"What an awful barrier sentiment can be!"

"It's not what you give, but what you *refrain* from giving, that holds a man your slave. His love can outlive benefits, but not—expectation."

"When you have conquered the illusions of Love, the falling away of the personality they clothed cannot hurt you. It is only a confirmation of your wiser judgment. Be thankful for that, not regretful."

"Say to youth—'Test and try before you buy,' and it will still make its purchases blindfold."

"Do you thank Fate that you are a beautiful woman? Rather should you curse it. To be beloved of many is no enviable lot! Coquette designates your pathway of conquest. A smile is encouragement. A chance meeting a trap. A granted request makes of triviality a binding agreement. Every declaration of passion proclaims you heartless. Could I—dared I—write my life as it has been, I should call it *A Jilt's Journal*, to please my disappointed lovers. And—*The Confessions of a Fool*, to please myself."

I stopped reading abruptly and closed the book. Were these my mother's thoughts, her experiences, or had she only put them into the mouth of her heroine? It was always a woman who spoke them, and they had a cynical flavor that seemed to say she was no happy or innocent one. I went over the professor's story. I dwelt on his picture of her beauty and allurements. "She was loved wherever

she went. It seemed her prerogative. No man could resist her."

That was what he had said. And here, in her book, a similar confession met me. Its opening sentence ran thus: "Fenella's fate was to be loved, and love was her life's ban and blessing. She could only make one lover happy, but a hundred believed each individual unit meant that *one*. Thus on the threshold of life she was an education in the art of disappointment."

A hundred lovers—and only one could mean anything to oneself were one ever so gifted, or ever so beautiful. How I wished I knew if she had penned those lines from personal experience.

They set me thinking and wondering. They opened out a new vista of life. All her beauty and the love she had won did not appear to have made this heroine happy. The last page was the sigh of a broken heart, a prayer for death. Could one picture imaginary unhappiness with such graphic force? Must it not be felt ere it could be expressed?

I knew that I myself could not present it as a reality, however hard I might try, because to me it was an unknown thing. Little griefs, trivial sorrows, these I had of course experienced, but not anything of the vague discontent, the passionate misery that breathed in those pages.

They gave me food enough for thought, and I never noticed how the time was slipping on.

Into my warm nook the sun still streamed. The austere outlines of surrounding hills leaned against the soft blue of a sky that seemed to stoop toward them. Far away to the west an old coach road wound its way, like a resolute thought determined on a distant goal. Rooks cawed in leafless elms

that towered around the old gray church. The current of life stirred in the sleepy old town. It was a holiday, and the solitary inn had awakened to responsibilities—and profits.

I became conscious of all this in some dreamy fashion that mingled with the book and its story and my own thoughts. Gradually, through the dreaminess, a sense of things relative to the outer world began to mingle. A chatter and laughter that heralded the approach of something unconcerned with dreams.

I stirred cautiously in my concealing nook, and looked around.

A party of men and women stood on the slope below. From them came the chatter and laughter that so ill accorded with the quiet of this old historic place.

I leant forward, wondering who they were; quickly conscious of the intrusion of worldliness, curiosity and frivolity among the sacred things of life.

One woman's face, uplifted in its audacity of beauty and comment, caught my glance. I knew it at once. She was the woman I had remarked in church on Christmas Day.

As I looked down she saw me, and pointed me out to the group of which she seemed the leader and guide. Other heads turned in my direction, and I drew back.

Presently I heard a voice behind me—a woman's voice.

"Can you tell me," it said, "which of these towers is the Butavant? No one seems to know, and this appears to be that *rara avis*, an historical ruin without an historical guide attached to it."

I half rose and turned in the direction of the speaker. The lovely, impertinent face, the indescribable air of distinction and luxury and perfection of clothing, held me dumb with wondering admiration.

I pointed to the dungeon tower and narrow gangway. "That is the place," I said. "But the stairs are very narrow, and you want strong nerves to climb them."

"Oh, then I'll send Bobby," she said coolly, and turning, made a speaking trumpet of her hand, and shouted something to someone below our level. Then she turned to me. "He's my husband," she said, "and has no nerves to speak of. It will do him good."

I suppose I stared. She was the revelation of a type of womanhood as yet unknown. The woman of the world. Such a woman as breathed in the pages of *Friendship*—audacious, insolent, self-possessed, and, to an ignoramus like myself, inexpressibly fascinating. She made me feel commonplace, almost boorish. Her eyes, of that curious turquoise blue, so cold and yet so lovely, roved from my face to my dress, rested on the book I held, swept upward to the ruins, downward to the gray-roofed town, then back to my face again in a space of seconds.

"Do you live here?" she asked sweetly. "I think I remember your face; I saw you in church."

I felt flattered. "I have not lived here—yet," I said. "But I am to do so."

"Poor child!" she said with mocking compassion. "What a life! Buried alive expresses it. Is there a *must* in the background in the shape of an unnatural parent?"

I felt myself color. "I am to live with my uncle. But he is not unnatural. He is making archæological researches respecting these old ruins. Perhaps you have heard of him—Professor Trent?"

Her laugh chimed so sweetly on the still, crisp air that I hardly noted its heartlessness. "My dear child, *do* I look as if I knew anything of any 'ology whatever, or any professor of it? But I have heard the St. Quintons, where I'm staying, speak of your uncle. He is very learned, and very clever, and quite a recluse, they say. Does he destine you for a similar existence? If so, I should counsel rebellion."

We were both standing now. Though taller than herself, I envied a grace of carriage, which I felt was inimitable.

"He does go to London sometimes," I said.

Again she laughed. "You mean to say you will go also. That promises entertainment! Lectures and *soirées* of the Royal Archæological and Geographical and Astronomical, and all the other societies! How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

Again her eyes swept me from crown of head to tip of toe.

"All life before you," she said suddenly. "And that face—and buried alive beneath musty ruins, and dug-up fossils, and ponderous, dry-as-dust professors. Poor child!"

"It is very kind of you to pity me," I said, with a sudden show of spirit, "but there may be very good things to be got out of the life."

"That's for you to say, of course. My advice would be—'get out of it yourself.' Discontent is fortune's first favor. If we did not long to fly we should never learn to walk."

Perhaps I looked perplexed. Such metaphor was a little beyond the average schoolgirl's knowledge of life and manners.

"Why," she went on suddenly, "I was married at your age. Like you, I had just left school when I met Bobby."

Then another peal of laughter escaped her lovely lips. "Look!" she cried, and pointed to the broken and unsafe stairway, up which a short, fat and eminently ungraceful figure was making its way, jeered and urged on by the crowd below.

"That's Bobby," she said, laughing more than ever. "Would you think he was a peer of the realm, and 'Earl of broad acres,' as the story books say? He is, though, and has the honor to be my legal possessor. What do you think of him? Don't birth and breeding and aristocratic lineage speak out in those fat limbs, that unwieldy figure? But you should hear him talk! Why, a stableman could give him points in grammar. Funny, isn't it, that Eton and Oxford can't turn out better things than a Board school?"

I felt more bewildered than ever. That a lady, a titled lady, one wedded to a peer of the realm, should talk of her affairs to an utter stranger in this frank manner was more than a surprise.

"How astonished you look," she went on. "It must be funny to find anything in life to astonish one. I wish I could. The nearest approach to it I've had for years is to see Bobby climbing up that old stairway, with the grace of a monkey on a stick. I hope he won't tumble down and break his neck. I want to be Duchess of Dorchester before I die, so I'm very careful of him."

"You sent him up there!" I said.

"Yes. I didn't think it was so risky."

Again she called out: "Come down, Bobby; come down! You'll break your neck!"

I saw the figure halt, turn awkwardly round, and then commence to scramble backward amidst the shouts and screams of his friends below.

"You see how obedient he is," she observed, turning again to me. "And I married him when I was only as old as yourself, and no one could do anything with him before! That fact has ranked me as one of the cleverest women in London. I've run him like a show, and he's not been such a bad investment."

A feeling of disgust swept over me. To look at this lovely face, this radiant figure, and then hear such words!

It reminded me of the princess out of whose mouth the frogs leaped whenever she spoke.

Words like those I had heard seemed to clothe thoughts as unlovely as the frogs, and as repelling in their cold heartlessness.

"You haven't much to say for yourself," she said suddenly. "Suppose I told you I had taken an interest in you?"

"I really don't know why you should," I answered.

"Perhaps because you don't like *me*, and that's a thing I never permit. They call me Lorely in London, because—but if you ever go there you'll hear my history, or I shall see you. Will you make a bet on it?"

I shook my head. "Why should we—bet? If it is to be, it will be. That's enough."

"Kismet, you mean? Will you come down and be introduced to those people? The St. Quintons

know your uncle. They were speaking about him to-day while we drove here. Come back with us to lunch."

She gave the invitation as if the Court and all belonging to it were at her service. I felt more puzzled than ever at the ways of society.

"I will come down," I said, "because I should like to know Lord St. Quinton. I have heard so much about him."

"Oh! Darky's not a bad old thing," she said carelessly. "We all call him that," she added, seeing my look of surprise. "Darchdale is too formal, you know, so it got to Darch, and then Darky. It's the way to nickname everyone now. The smartest idea is to find a name so appropriate that it explains the person. My dear, what a lot you have to learn!"

"Of the world and society? I suppose so. I wonder——"

Then I stopped abruptly.

"What, or how much?" she asked quickly.

"Of course I know there are different grades—sets. I was only going to say I wonder if you know anyone in London of the name of Heath?"

"Heath—the Archie Heaths? Lady Archie is a great pal of mine. Do you mean them? They live in Stanhope Street."

"Yes," I said, "that is my friend's address. So you know her mother?"

"Step-mother," she corrected. "Lady Archie is the second wife."

"Yes, of course. But Lesley always called her mother."

"She told me she had a daughter to introduce next season," continued my new acquaintance.

"Odd that she should be a school friend of yours. I knew she was at a school in the country for her health. Well, our destinies seem converging, Miss—Trent, isn't it?"

"That," I said, "is my name."

"And here's Darcy and the rest of them. Let me introduce you as my new discovery — my archaeological discovery. By the way, what's your Christian name?"

"Paula——"

"Paula! How lovely! It quite redeems the commonplace Trent. I shall call you that. It's the privilege of my superior years. I came of age a year ago!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT a luncheon party that was!

Talk of a baptism of fire for a man, it is nothing I should say to the baptism of disillusion women offer to their sex, by way of preparing them for social warfare.

To the people who surrounded me nothing seemed sacred, or pure, or worthy of respect. Nothing serious except dress and baccarat. I felt as ignorant and as "out of" every subject of discussion as of the mode of discussing it. I listened eagerly enough, because the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge seemed so tempting, but I could feel the color come and go at the half-mocking compliments and comments on myself, and I was conscious of alternate shame and anger at my ignorance.

The ball of frivolous chatter, tossed so lightly and so rapidly by these practiced hands, took a hundred prismatic colors in its flight. I wondered how they had words at command for that incessant sport of repartee, cynicism, or epigram. Yet it was all very heartless. A shower of rockets whose sparks warmed nothing they touched, only left a brilliant track in the air ere darkness caught them.

They filled me with wonder, these people to whom the great world was a playground—its great names puppets of their show. As for Lord Brancepeth, whom everyone called "Bobby," he was to me the greatest surprise of all. Certainly if I had not

been told he was an earl I should never have mistaken him for a gentleman. His talk was all of horses, and studs, and jockeys. It was vulgar and slangy, as well as ungrammatical. His wife made open sport of him to his face, and when I looked at her, so lovely, so young, so full of that supreme distinction which has no name, I marveled what on earth could have induced her to marry such a boor!

"Have we shocked you very much, Paula?" she asked me, when luncheon was at last over, and the party were sitting, lounging, or smoking in the hall.

I was longing to get away and to get home. I felt so completely out of my element here. Their language was a shibboleth, their laughter a scream, their jests things of double meaning—to me incomprehensible.

"Shocked me—I don't know," I said doubtfully. "It is very hard to make out what you all mean. You talk so fast, and you never seem to give anything its right name, or any person."

"Poor little country mouse!" she mocked. "If Lesley Heath is anything like you, Archie will have her hands full!"

"She is not at all like me," I said. "She is very beautiful and very accomplished."

"Could you see all that in another girl and not be jealous?" she asked, taking a match out of the tiny gold box which hung at her chatelaine, and proceeding to light a cigarette.

I watched the process in unbounded amazement.

"You—smoke?" I gasped.

"Certainly. Why not? Did you never see a woman smoke before?"

"Never!"

She burst into a laugh that Nature had modu-

lated beyond the power of fashion to mar. "You are quite too delicious!" she exclaimed.

Then she turned round to another fashionable exotic lounging on a great cushioned divan near the open fireplace.

"My dear Larks," she said, "look at this piece of simplicity! Fancy, she has never seen a woman smoke till to-day!"

Several pairs of eyes turned on me, and I colored hotly beneath their fire and impertinence. I wished I could have left my seat and got away, but I seemed glued to it.

"Make her try a whiff herself," answered the lady addressed. "She's not half a schoolgirl if she says 'no' to the chance."

"Thank you, I'd rather not," I exclaimed quickly. "I don't mind seeing men smoke, but I think it's horrid for a woman!"

An amazed stare met me, followed by a burst of scornful laughter.

"A female Daniel come to judgment!" murmured the lady whom I had already heard addressed as "Larks" and "Lady-bird," but whose rightful designation was Lady Larkington.

"She's quite right, though," said a tall, military-looking man, who was hanging over the speaker's chair. "It's horrid, beastly horrid. Spoils your teeth, your breath, your nerves, your clothes. Beats me why you do it. You can't enjoy it, for you nearly all do it in the wrong way. If it wasn't the thing to copy us, you'd pitch Turkish and Egyptians to the wind, and your silver cases and match boxes after them."

"Hear the oracle!" exclaimed Lady Brancepeth. "I begin to think innocence is catching."

"Hardly," he said. "When you're by to disinfect us."

"That's beastly 'rude," she said coolly. "And very stupid, for no one nowadays could put up with such a primitive virtue! You, Jim, least of all."

"Innocence," observed Lady Larkington, "is the one thing men pretend to admire, and hate to possess!"

"As if they ever did possess it. If they do it never outlasts their first suit of knickerbockers."

"If it comes to that," chimed in Bobby, "well, damme, a girl's don't seem to last longer than *hers*. She wears 'em too."

The usual scream greeted this witticism.

"Oh—I think it goes as far as the church door—in appearance," said Lady Brancepeth.

"That means the marriage service gives it the *coup de grâce*."

"Well, you could hardly expect innocence to outlive *that*, even if read by an archbishop."

"Why do women believe in nothing that seems good?" asked the man whom they called Jim.

"Because it only *seems* good, I suppose. Women know each other. Men only know what women choose to let them know of—women."

"Deuced lot of wickedness if they're to be believed."

"Wickedness is the salt of life. It's capable of such endless variations!" said Lady Brancepeth.

"And do *you* think smoking a sign of lost innocence, Jim?" asked Lady Larkington.

"Oh, no! I've known some quite good women smoke, because they couldn't afford to be singular. We get so very exclusive in these days of Radical newspapers."

"Good women!" murmured Lady Brancepeth. "There's quite a country farmhouse flavor about the sound. A good woman is the sort of female that a man always speaks of as '*my friend*, Mrs. So and So,' and always makes use of, like charity, to hide a multitude of sins."

"His own—or someone else's?"

"Either, poor souls! when there's any whitewashing to be done."

Now what on earth good women could have to do with whitewashing puzzled me. In the first place, it wasn't a woman's work. In the next, the character of the person employed to do it wouldn't affect that work.

"So safe too—if men only married what was best for them," murmured another voice.

"There is a spirit of contradiction in marriage which only comes out after the ceremony. We never do what men expect, nor they what we desire."

"I wonder we marry you at all," observed Bobby.

"You wouldn't if you could help it, I'm very sure. But every man expects his dip into the lottery will bring him a prize. Women are less hopeful, and take disappointment as their portion."

"They know there are no prizes, perhaps," said Lady Brancepeth.

Her eyes rested on her "lottery ticket," and mine followed them. Bobby's fat, awkward figure was squatting on a chair, his legs straddled either side of it, as if it were a horse. His arms rested on the back and he had a huge cigar in his mouth. Anything more uncouth or unlovely it would be difficult to imagine. Again I thought of this dainty, exquisite creature mated with such a common, brain-

less boor, and a sort of disgust swept over me. I moved restlessly in my seat, and she turned.

"You look tired," she said. "I suppose you're bored to death. Would you like to go home? Are you pining for fossils and mussels?—is it mussels they pick up and specify? or do they belong to another 'ology? Well, I'll ask Darky to send you back in one of his traps, or a bike, if you prefer."

"I'll drive you home, if you'll allow me," said the military man, of whose name I was still ignorant.

Lady Brancepeth's blue eyes flashed angrily.

"Nonsense," she said. "There are heaps of grooms and coachmen. And I want you, Jim, for a Badminton set in the covered court. A little exercise will do you good—you're getting stout."

Yet when I had stiffly and uncomfortably gone through the ordeal of adieux, and got myself out of that strange atmosphere into the cool, damp outer air, it was no groom who sprang up beside me in the dogcart, but the same "Jim" who had declared he agreed with my opinion as to women smoking.

"I'm going to drive you home," he said, "if you'll allow me the pleasure?"

I began to feel of great importance. A man of the world, of fashion, so good-looking too, and forsaking these beautiful witty women to drive me, a mere schoolgirl.

"It is very kind of you," I said. "But I thought you were wanted for Badminton?"

"They'll have to do without me," he said, taking the reins. "Plenty to take my place. Fond of driving?"

"I love it," I said. "But I'm afraid I love a great many things I have to do without."

"You're young enough," he said, "to wait for them. They're pretty sure to come."

Not sharing his confidence in the future, I ventured to ask a reason for it.

He gave me a quick glance. "You must be an awful little innocent," he said, "not to know how pretty you are, and a pretty woman is a social power, you know. She can get most anything she wants."

I felt a sudden increase of color in my cheeks, and remained silent for a moment.

"Will you tell me," I said presently, "why those people talked as they did? I don't suppose they really *meant* half the horrid things they said."

"Oh, yes, they did, some of them. Lorely, for instance—she has the bitterest tongue of the lot. Goodness knows why! She made her own choice, but she girds at it and the man as if she were the injured party."

"When I looked at her," I said eagerly, "such a dream of loveliness—and then at Lord——"

"Oh, don't give him his title, pray! No one ever does. Yes, she's played rather low down, taking that stable-yard cad!"

"But you said——"

"I know. I said he was her own choice. I suppose she thought he'd have his uses. You see, in the world we've left behind us there are queer motives for marrying. Some do it for—wealth; some for convenience; some for—safety."

"Safety?" I echoed.

He laughed. "There are husbands," he said, who put on the curb, and others who drive with a loose rein, and yet others who never look into the stable yard at all. But there, child, this sort of talk must

be all Greek to you. Besides, you're not of the stuff those women are. I wonder whether they've got such a thing as a soul between them. Certainly they do their best to hide it."

"Do they always make sport of everything?"

"It's their way; it's supposed to be smart, and one caps the other. They ape heartlessness until they seem to possess it. Now and then you *may* dig up a bit of real womanhood under the veneer, but it takes some finding."

"They must *feel*, suffer, love, some time or other in their lives?"

"Perhaps they do, but there's always doctors, and pick-me-ups, and fools—to console them!"

I was silent. This first peep into a new phase of life had been so startling that it took time to re-adjust my ideas to their former position.

When he spoke again his voice was earnest and less bitter.

"I hope, Miss—Paula," he said, "that you'll never grow up into a woman of fashion. You heard them jeer at innocence and men's belief in it. Take my word, a man *does* believe in it, does reverence when he finds it. The love he gives his mother, his wife, his child, is the only sheet anchor his nature possesses. When that drags, or is cut away, he doesn't much care what becomes of himself. I daresay it seems a bit odd I should talk to you like this, but I was watching you during luncheon, and—afterward, and I knew none of them would show you the ropes, only jibe and mock. You said something about life being dull here. If you only knew how *safe* that dullness is! You ought to bless the Fates for it. But, of course, you don't. You'll never be content until you're trying your wings in

the flight to conquest like the rest of 'em. Not all the preaching in the world would teach a girl with your eyes and hair that her nest in the hedge is better than the gilded cage in town. There!—what a duffer you'll think me, and why I talk like this I'm sure I don't know. It's not my way, and how the women would laugh if they heard me!—and you?"

"I shall not laugh," I said, "although it's hard to believe the world is so harmful, and teaches more of wrong than right. But women like those at Quinton Court——"

"They are a contemptible set," he said. "They ape our vices, and mock at all womanly virtues. The very word is old-fashioned—they scream at it. They were only baiting you all the time, though perhaps you didn't see it. Don't ever want to be like one of them. Evil's an insidious thing; it's best not handled. Like tar, some of it's pretty sure to stick to your fingers!"

We were silent again until we had almost reached the house. Then I took my courage in my hands.

"I don't know your name," I said. "They only called you——"

"Jim. Yes, that's their way. I'll give you my card, if you like, but I suppose we'll hardly meet again. I'm leaving here to-morrow and going abroad. Still, I'm glad to have met you. It's like a breath of pure air after a night of cards and drink and smoke. After some such night, when I leave the tables, and the dice, and the company behind, I'll remember our drive and our talk. They'll perhaps help to keep a spark of good alight somewhere in my soul. This is your house, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "and thank you for all this trouble, and for being so kind."

He laughed shortly. "You will find men kind enough to a face like yours," he said. "It's the women who'll be your foes."

I sprang lightly down from the step. "Oh—your card! You promised it," I said, looking up.

He shifted the reins into one hand and searched his pockets with the other.

"I can't open it. Take care and all," he said. "It'll do for a keepsake in memory of our drive. Good-by once more."

I gave him my hand as he stooped toward me. Then quite suddenly I remembered my mother's book. I had left it behind at the Court.

"Oh—I've forgotten my book," I said hastily.

"What book?"

"I was reading it when Lady Brancepeth found me—up on the castle hill. Will you please ask for it when you go back? I wouldn't lose it for the world."

"What makes it so valuable?" he asked.

"It's written by my mother. It is the only one she ever had published, though she wrote others."

"So you are the daughter of an authoress. May I ask her name?"

"The same as my own," I said, "Paula Trent."

"And is she——"

"She died," I said, "when I was quite a little child. I have no memory of her."

"I will get your book, and bring it back to-morrow."

"But I thought you were leaving——"

"So I am. I'll stop here on the way to the station for a few minutes—so it's only '*au revoir*.'"

He waved his hand and drove off, leaving a flattered, wondering and speculative Paula behind.

CHAPTER VIII.

MERRIELESS brought me my tea as usual at five o'clock. She was brimful of curiosity as to my long absence.

I told her its history. Her comments amused me. Also her prophecies as to my own brilliant doings in the near future.

"And such a grand gentleman as drove you home, miss," she said.

"He is an officer," I said, with a glance to where the Russia leather card-case lay, its silver monogram shining in the lamplight.

I had discovered his name was Captain James Conway, and I had a pleasant memory of Paula Trent, the schoolgirl, capable of arousing interest in the breast of a gallant soldier, a man of the world, and a great lady's *cavaliere servente*.

She was indeed coming out of her shell!

"How did you see him, Merry?" I inquired.

"I was just lighting the lamp, miss, and looked out of the window when I heard the wheels, and you a-talkin' in a very earnest way, miss. I looked incuriously, but there was light enough in the sky to show a handsome gentleman, and I felt he was interested by the way he held your hand, and looked down at you."

"That's nothing, Merry; only politeness."

"'Tis always politeness—at first, miss; leading gradual to the oncoming of familiarities; walking out, and holding hands, and such like."

I drank my tea slowly, and waited for further information.

"You see, having gone through it all myself, miss, I've got the knowledge. And though with my sort 'tis more nature than 'by your leave,' it do mean very much the same thing in the end."

"Yes?" I questioned.

"'Tis a queer hobble—love," she continued. "To think of the days that come and go and not a morrow of them with any extra meaning, till sudden-like it's—'Will I be seeing him?' or 'Will he be there?' and listening for a step you've come to know out of a hundred others, and sick at heart when you don't hear it, and all of a flutter if you do. And lifted sky high if so be he's kindly disposed, and down-dropped to what Aunt Graddage do call the Valley o' Humblification if he be indifferent. A wearing thing, miss, even at the best way o' it."

"It seems so, indeed," I said gravely. "And all these sensations go to show you're in love, do they, Merry?"

"That's right, miss. Then it gets to the fever time. That's bad. You've got to mind yourself then, miss, as well as to keep *him* in his place. Yet not to be too chilling neither for fear o' dispiriting his fancies. There's so many wimmen in the world that a man can just pick and choose where he pleases, and oftentimes the ugly ones get what the pretty ones lose by sheer rebelliousness."

"How came you to learn such things, Merry?" I asked her.

"'Tis Nature teaches us, I think, miss, and the best school-time is the love-time."

I looked thoughtfully into the fire, and gave the subject due consideration. It was pleasant to be

initiated into such mysteries, to feel oneself gliding down the stream of knowledge helped by an impersonal experience. The contrast between this country girl's simple confessions, and the mocking sneers of the great ladies of the social world, interested me greatly. I was getting at two sides of an all-important question, yet keeping myself in the background as a mere inquirer.

"Do you think people ever fall in love the first time they see each other?" I asked.

"'Tis mostly men as does that, miss, bein' in a manner o' way caught by beauty, and the snare o' it. I've heerd say 'tis like a spark lighting on furze, and a quick blaze to follow. But that's not so much the way in our manner o' life as in the higher circles where you'll be getting to, miss. Wonderful 'tis, I've heerd, the ways o' them. Putting the whole sex into shape o' one single woman, and makin' so much o' her that the others aren't considered no more than if they weren't seen, or heerd on. A rare way o' loving—*that*, miss, and 'twill come along the way o' yourself or I'm much mistaught."

"I can't think how you come to know so much," I said, laughing. "You're a perfect encyclopædia on affairs of the heart, Merry!"

"I do prime myself on some knowlageableness, miss," she said complacently. "Not in the way o' bein' proud or vain-glorious, seein' how it came to me through much tribulation. But I've been told stories o' this sort by them as has been deceived, and them as hasn't. 'Tis a way o' talkin' girls get to, not bein' gifted with fine feelin's as you're brought up to, miss."

"I wonder," I said, "if the knowledge is useful?"

"Must be, miss; or you'll court experience with a babe's helplessness, 'stead o' a woman's wit."

I sat by the fire long after she had left me and pondered these things in my heart. I also wrote a long letter to Lesley, mentioning my new acquaintances and Lady Brancepeth's friendship with her stepmother. There seemed a great deal to tell, once I began to write, or else my habit of putting small events into many words, and building a history round them, had again come into play.

I wrote of the young farmer, Adam Herivale. I contrasted him incidentally with Captain Conway. It seemed odd that in so short a time I should have met two men so totally different in station, manners and breeding, and could write so freely of both. When the letter was finished, I found there was still an hour before supper. I was at a loss how to employ my time.

The cold, dreary drawing-room possessed no piano, nor did Graddage consider it necessary to light a fire there except on Sundays—"to air it," as she called that office. I had only my school books to read, and I felt I had had quite enough of them in the years that had passed. I felt angry at my stupidity in leaving my mother's book behind. It would have been so pleasant to sit by the fire and finish those confessions of Fenella.

I grew so restless that I went to the window and drew up the blind. The moon was at the full and shone with dazzling brightness. A touch of frost silvered the holly tree and the grass, and made diamonds along the graveled walk. I suddenly resolved to go out. The posting of my letter would be excuse; there was no need to ask permission. I seemed free to do as I pleased since I had come to Scarffe.

I got into jacket and hat without delay, took up the letter, and ran downstairs. As I reached the hall Mrs. Graddage came out of the dining-room. She stared at me.

"You're surely not goin' walking by yourself, Miss Paula, at this hour o' night!" she exclaimed.

"What's the matter with the hour?" I asked.

"'Tis unseemly for young ladies to be walkin' abroad alone."

"I don't suppose the professor would come if I asked him, and I'm only going to the post. As for being alone *here*, why, I don't suppose there's a soul in the streets. They've all gone to bed, poor things!"

"'Twas a holiday, and there may be rough farmin' folk about."

I laughed. "I'll risk that, Graddy. If I don't turn up by supper time you can send Merrieless to look for me. My absence won't cost the professor an anxious moment."

I opened the door and went out to the tune of "A generation lofty in their own eyes, and their eyelids lifted up!"

I laughed softly to myself as I walked over the uneven pavement.

"Could Graddy ever have been a girl?" I thought. "What a queer one. I can't imagine her ever *feeling* young, even when she was it. And yet she found a man to marry her. What a life she must have led him!"

Then my thoughts flew off on a new tack.

The cold, brisk air set my blood tingling. Above my head the sky was thickly studded with glittering stars. Serene and pure the full moon hung like a ball of white flame above the ruined castle. To look

at that stately pile from here was to feel all its wonder and romance. To picture the ghosts of dead and gone heroes leaning over those ruined battlements, crossing that ancient drawbridge, moving in stately measure over the green slopes, gazing with sad eyes over scenes they had known in their stirring and martial lives.

Insensibly the spell of the ruins began to work upon me. To be so constantly overshadowed by them was to feel their strange, eventful history asserting its claim on memory, and linking the past to present associations.

A quarter of an hour's walk brought me to the entrance of the little town, and, as Graddy had said, I found it in a comparatively lively condition. Farmers' carts and wagons were rolling homeward. In the deep old doorways friends were taking noisy leave of each other. The inn was astir with holiday folk, old and young, and a general joviality seemed professing it was Christmas time and excusing an extra glass on the strength of it.

I dropped my letter into the box, then remembering I had no stamps, went to buy some. The post-office combined its own duties with those of a grocer's store. It appeared to be doing a brisk trade this evening.

I stood a little aside waiting my turn; glancing over backs and heads, shawls and hats of all descriptions. Among them I descried my friend the young farmer. He too was buying stamps. As he turned from the counter we were face to face, and it pleased me to see the warm color rise in his own, the flash of pleasure in his eyes.

He lifted his cap and wished me "Good evening."

"I am waiting to get some stamps," I said.

"Can I get them for you? There's rather a crowd."

"If you will," I said, handing him a shilling.

In a few moments he was back with the purchase.

"Is that all?" he inquired.

"Yes, I've no housekeeping to look after."

"It's a bit late for you to be out alone," he remarked as we left the shop.

"What's to harm me?" I asked carelessly. "A quiet place like this is as safe as the kitchen at home. And I wanted to get rid of an hour, so I ran out to post a letter."

"I'm late returning to Woodcote," he said; "but mother gave me a lot of commissions to do for her. I'm going to a friend's presently to call for my sisters. Can I have the pleasure of seeing you a bit of the way home?"

"Oh—if you like," I said indifferently. "Do you often come into the town?"

"Yes, when things are wanted. Father or I have to; and he doesn't care much about it now."

"What a lovely night," I said, glancing skyward. "Do you know the sky looks clearer here than it did at Salisbury."

"We're much higher up, and the air is fine and rare on these hills. Cold enough in winter time though. This is a wonderful mild night for the time o' year."

"I think it cold enough," I said. "There's frost on the fields."

"We'll be having skating if it lasts. There's a fine pond nigh our farm, the Mere Pond it's called. A couple o' nights like this and the ice will bear fine. Do you skate, Miss Trent?"

"No. I'd like to, but I've never had a chance of learning."

"I'd be proud to teach you, if you'll let me."

"I should think I would!" I said eagerly. "Why, I'm thankful for anything to lighten these long, dull days."

He looked up again at the brilliant sky. "I think we're in for a spell o' cold. Could you find your way out to the farm supposing the frost lasted? It's a goodish bit to walk."

"Oh! I'm not afraid of a walk," I said. "And I can bring my maid to show me the way. By the way, she's—what do you call it?—keeping company with a young man on your farm. Gregory—something—I forget the name."

"There's two Gregorys," he said, and I saw him smile. "Can't be the old one, Miss Trent, though he's a rare favorite with the women. Quite a character is old Blox."

"Ah, that's the name! It's the young one, but the fame of the father has reached me already."

Again he smiled.

"The old rascal's got into mischief sometimes," he said. "It's odd that the son should be so staid and proper, and the old one, who ought to know better, such a Lothario."

We were out of the town now, and the road lay before us, a white straight line in the moonlight.

I stopped suddenly. "You really need not come further," I said. "I'm taking you out of your way, and there's no necessity for it."

"I'd rather see you safe back if you don't mind. There are not many bad characters about, I know, but now and then a tramp or a laborer, carrying a

drop too much, have been known to molest strangers. Please let me."

"Oh, if you wish. I don't mind," I said.

"I'd go home more easy in my mind," he answered, and again we walked on.

All the quiet country, shut in by those ever-circling hills, lay in a profound and beautiful peace about us. There was no sound save the occasional sharp interrogation of a dog, the echo of our own footsteps on the frozen road.

"How beautiful night always is," he said.

"Yes; but I like the summer nights best."

"You would," he answered. "Being young and a woman, and full of the poetry of things."

"But don't you prefer June to December?"

"Maybe—not," he answered slowly. "There's things can make our summer-time for us though the snow's on the ground, and never a bird to sing; and there's a cold that comes to heart and soul that never a June sun can warm."

"You've lived those things, and I suppose you understand them. I haven't."

"I'd be sorry to know you had, Miss—Trent. 'Tis a beautiful time coming for you. Youth and beloved womanhood. When I look at a young girl on the threshold of life, so to say, it seems to me always as if she had her hands full of pearls; pure thoughts, pure dreams, pure hopefulness. And it's hard on her that the world's so full of other greedy hands snatching them for sport o' the thing, and mostly throwing them into the mud and trampling them so that she never can pick them up—as they were."

"That's very pretty," I said, "but very fanciful. You're more like a poet than a farmer."

"Am I? Then 'tis because I love it so. Poetry's an education of the soul; 'tis the finest sort o' religion, I often think."

I remembered "Extracts for the Use of Schools"; the reciting of "Casabianca," and "Excelsior," and "The May Queen." And I demurred.

"Have you ever read Shelley?" he asked.

"No. We weren't allowed to read poetry at school."

"My! What strange ways they do have of educating girls—young ladies, I mean."

"Perhaps they're afraid of making us romantic."

"Beautiful thoughts put into beautiful words couldn't harm anyone," he answered. "It has come to me often while reading that the world isn't half grateful enough to its authors. They give us, in their way, what God gave in His. For a thought must have words to clothe it, and 'tis the words make it comprehensible and comforting. He couldn't speak save by the voice of the flesh, so He clothed His thought with life and set it, a man amongst men, to speak of His glory. And 'twas only a few could read *that* book, but see what a power it held. For the world can't ever forget it, till it ceases to be a world."

I thought how well he spoke when he was moved to eloquence. It might have been better for me to have rested content with that thought instead of pursuing its reason, and giving it a motive power.

But the newly discovered Paula was waking rapidly to a sense of feminine importance, and her nature, as it awakened, spread eager wings for further flight to realms of enchanting discoveries.

A man's nature, at once so simple, and earnest,

and plain-spoken as was Adam Herivale's, seemed to afford an excellent region for exploration.

Propriety, as instilled into the virgin mind, has a certain falseness about it that soon clamors for banishment. Once out of leading strings, the claims of conventionality are more likely to be cut asunder, than treated as a curb. I sent my hampering guardian galloping down the hill of freedom on this occasion, and talked and was talked to by a wholesome, manly tongue, as I had never been by governesses and teachers.

It seemed to brace and refresh me. But I saw no dangers ahead, and the discovery that I was worth talking to was exhilarating.

Afterward, when I taxed memory to recall his words, when I thought them over in solitude, I found myself asking would anyone else in Paula Trent's place have served equally well as Adam Herivale's listener. I might have believed it, in a sudden fit of humility, but for two things.

One was a look in those clear blue eyes, as he shook hands; the other his parting words—"How I shall pray for this frost to continue, Miss Trent!"

The look held a certain lingering admiration that spoke something more than a homage to sex. The words—a hardly suppressed desire for future meetings.

To me neither meant more than a self-revelation eminently flattering, and a promise of further triumphs.

CHAPTER IX.

A SUNBEAM fluttering into my room next morning laid a light, awakening touch on my eyelids, and I opened them to its dancing welcome.

For a few moments I lay quietly content with warmth, and the brightness of the outer world, and the thrice-blessed knowledge that I was no longer compelled to rise at a given moment, face the cold of the atmosphere as well as the water jug, and descend with half-frozen fingers to a meal of porridge, thick bread, and weak tea.

"Life is getting very pleasant," I said complacently, and let my thoughts stray to and fro over the eventfulness of three apparently uneventful days.

By that simple number I alone counted my freedom. Yet they had been full enough of importance to lend a tinge of excitement to memory as I passed them in review.

"And to-day," I thought to myself, "I shall see him again."

Remembering there were two "hims" now concerned in my destiny, I particularized this special one by the name my mind had given him—"Captain Jim!"

What a pity he was going away! How nice it would have been to be taught skating by him.

Did those hothouse exotics at Quinton Court skate? I wondered. They looked so useless, with their tight-fitting gowns, and tiny waists and high-

heeled shoes and marvelously coiffured hair, that I could not picture them doing anything requiring natural exertion. Well, I should soon know.

Merry's entrance aroused me from sleepy content. My first inquiry was as to the weather.

"Freezing hard, miss, and cold fit to bite your nose off," was her answer.

"Good for skating?" I said.

"Maybe to those as have liberty. That's not a sort of playment as often comes my way."

"I'm going to learn," I said, stretching a hand for the cup of tea she had brought.

"'Tis only right you should do aught that will pleasure you, miss, being so young and frolicsome as you are."

I laughed gayly. "Don't you feel like that too, Merry? You're not so much older."

"Save in the ways o' knowledge, miss. A different sort o' knowledge to your book learning, 'tis true, but it doesn't seem to leave the heart as young as it might be."

I dressed, and went downstairs to find the professor looking very pinched and cold, warming his coat tails at the fire as usual.

To him I also confided my views on skating. He knew nothing of the Mere Pond, though he had some acquaintance with the Herivale's history.

"A good old yeoman family," he said. "Date back to the sixteenth century. You'll find them mentioned in old chronicles of the county."

"Oh, then, there's no harm in my knowing them?"

"Harm," he repeated, and pushed back his spectacles to regard me. "How could there be harm, child? What do you mean?"

"I have met Adam Herivale, the son, two or three times, and he has offered to teach me skating."

"A fine healthy exercise and one to be encouraged," said the professor, looking out at the bright sunshine. "I regret it is beyond my power to accompany you; but"—his brow cleared, he removed his glasses—"there's Graddage," he said; "she'd go with you as—ah—as chaperon."

"Thank you," I said, laughing. "I fancy I see her face while waiting about for me at the pond's side this weather. Oh, no! professor. There's no need for her to martyrize herself. I'm all right. Very probably some of the people staying with Lord St. Quinton will be skating also. I told you I lunched there and had a general introduction yesterday."

"So you did, my dear, so you did. A first introduction to society you called it. Was it a pleasant one?"

"Not at all," I said indifferently. "I didn't enjoy it. They all seemed so heartless and frivolous. Not a man spoke as sensibly as Adam Herivale does."

"I have often found," he said, "that the cultured classes rarely display an intelligent interest in—ah—subjects that should appeal to intelligence."

I laughed. "If you could have listened to the conversation at that luncheon table yesterday your opinion would have been confirmed. They only talked of themselves and their acquaintances, and all the idiotic things they did—at least they seemed idiotic to me."

He regarded me with grave interest.

"It occurs to me, Paula, that I have another duty to perform with regard to you. I—I confess I hardly know how to set about it. You will natural-

ly look for pleasures and amusements suitable—ah—to your years—years I have left such a long way behind. I—I must consider the matter. Parties and dances I imagine come into the category of a young girl's expectations. Things quite out of my line, you must allow. But because I am an old bookworm it does not follow that your youth should be—ah—ostracized. The matter must be duly considered. Perhaps Lady St. Quinton would assist me. She has always seemed a very agreeable woman, and—ah—fairly intelligent.”

I looked at him in some surprise. “That is what the girls called ‘coming out.’ But, dear professor, am I in a position to move in London society—such society as those people at Quinton Court represent? You have no adequate idea of their extravagance. Why the women talked of paying twenty-five guineas for a simple morning frock, as I would of as many shillings.”

“Did they?” he said absently. “But you have money, Paula, and so have I. Frocks can be bought.”

I laughed.

“I know that, professor, but out of my allowance of a hundred a year I hardly see how I could buy them at twenty-five guineas each? That wouldn't leave much for boots and shoes, and hats and jackets, and all the other things constituting a well-dressed woman. No—such extravagances are not for me. With my friend Lesley Heath it is a different matter. She will go to Drawing-rooms, and be introduced into the proper set, and probably marry a title. That is what her mother expects, so I was told by her mother's friends. But who is Paula Trent that she should entertain such ambitions?

They called me 'country mouse,' and I think I had better remain that."

"It is for you to decide, my dear," he said, and I fancied I saw relief in his face. "The position you would take in the world would not be that of a titled nor wealthy young lady. But there are possibilities of success—in—in other ways."

"We will leave them at possibilities," I said, "for the present. Let me look on at life for a little while, professor, before I plunge into it."

Again he regarded me gravely, with natural vision unobscured by glasses.

"I daresay you will find it interesting," he said. "You seem to possess a considerable amount of sense and discrimination. To the observer of life nothing is insignificant. The smallest idiosyncrasy possesses a claim on the attention—and may serve as a clue to the character."

"Oh! I don't anticipate writing books," I said, "though I should like to. By the way, professor, there's one favor I'd like to ask of you. I spent a great deal of time at school on music. It seems a great pity not to keep it up. Can I have a piano?"

"By all means, my dear. Order one as soon as you please."

"Thank you," I said heartily. "But I hope the sound won't disturb you?"

"Oh! I think not. I think not. When I am engrossed in study, my—ah—outer senses are quite impervious to any intrusion from other sources. And I used to be very fond of music," he added.

He left the table and went to the window and looked out for a moment. When he came back and stood by the fire, there was that look in his face I had learned to know.

"She—used to play and sing," he said. His voice had taken a lower key, there was a reminiscent sadness in it. "How long ago it all seems! But the old music book is still in my possession. You shall have it, my dear. Perhaps you will give me the pleasure now and then of hearing the old tunes—the old songs. There was one I specially liked. I suppose you have heard of it. It would be old fashioned now, of course. It was about a wreath of roses. Foolish words, but there was a pathetic meaning in them when she sang; and once, in her laughing, girlish way, she curled her hair and put on a wreath of flowers like the—the picture on the title-page of the song. But that night I remember she refused to sing the last verse."

"What was the last verse?" I asked, intensely interested in all these traits of that unknown mother of mine.

"I think," he said thoughtfully, "that the girl is first crowned with roses in the beauty and gayety of youth. Then she wears the orange blossoms, the circlet of the bride; and at last the widow's cap, emblem of loss and broken-heartedness. All very sentimental, my dear, and absurd, no doubt, but sometimes—in the after years—one looks back on such trifles, and sentiment seems less foolish than it sounds."

I could never remember having kissed the professor in all my memories of our life together. Now, moved by some inexplicable impulse, I went swiftly across the room and put my arms about his neck. "How fond you were of her!" I said impulsively. "How well you remember!"

He stroked my hair as my head lay against the shoulder of his shabby old coat. "You have found

that out, my dear," he said gently. "I think I was—very fond of her. She made my life such a different thing while she was in it."

"If I were like her perhaps you would be fond of me, too," I said. "It's very lonely to have no home love when one's young."

My face was hidden, but I seemed to feel the surprise of his look, even as I felt the check of his pausing hand.

"Poor little girl," he said softly. "Poor little Paula. Has it seemed like that to you? I must try and remember——"

"Oh, no. I don't want you to alter your life or your habits—only to feel that I'm not in your way, that you don't mind if I tell you all the things that interest or happen to me."

"I shall be pleased if you will," he said. "Young life has a certain charm in its very ignorance and freshness. It is so illogical and romantic, and yet so vivid. My dear, never fancy I don't love you because I—I don't express it. My tongue has lost its trick of pretty words—grown rusty for want of use. You must charm it back, Paula."

He lifted my head and looked at me closely.

"Her eyes," he said, in a strangely quiet voice. "Her eyes looking back at me as I remember she used to look. Heaven grant, child, they may never hold what I have seen in hers."

CHAPTER X.

I SPENT the rest of the morning rearranging the stiff drawing-room; altering the position of furniture, deciding where my piano should go, and wondering whether such things as palms or screens or drapery could possibly make it in any sort of semblance to one of the rooms at Quinton Court.

Fortunately it had some good points. The paper was a plain, deep-toned terra-cotta, and the lace curtains were supported either side by heavy velvet ones rich in hue and texture. I foresaw a new arrangement of draping them, and I called in Merry to help, and bring the steps.

We were both engrossed in work, and chattering like two magpies, when the sound of wheels attracted our attention. I sprang down from my perch and surveyed a flushed face, dusty hands, and tumbled hair with horror.

"It's Captain Jim, of course. I'd quite forgotten. You must ask him in, Merry. He's on his way to the station, so I can't keep him waiting."

She ushered him in, and I displayed my dusty hands by way of greeting.

"Consider we've shaken 'how d'ye do.' Look at this dust! I've been energetically trying to alter this room into something more artistic. It doesn't look very promising, does it?"

"I think it looks charming," he said, but I noticed his eyes went no farther than my head.

"It may—some day," I answered gleefully. "I'm

to have a piano, and when I get books and flowers and a screen or two I think it will be presentable."

"I have a lot of odds and ends in my rooms in town," he said eagerly. "Bits of Algerian and Indian drapery, pottery, and all that. I wish you'd do me the favor to accept some. They're no earthly good to me, for I'll be at least three years in Egypt—and they're just the sort of things you could never pick up here, or even in town."

"Thank you very much," I said. "But really, Captain Conway, I am your debtor already for a very charming gift, and I cannot afford to be under any more obligations."

"Obligations—stuff! It's only useless lumber to me. If I leave it behind, I'll never see it again. Why shouldn't you give me such a simple pleasure as knowing the stuff was—where *you* are?"

"You put it very nicely," I said. "But I don't feel I ought to accept presents in this lavish fashion—Oh! you have brought my book back!"

"Yes, here it is. I found one of the women had got hold of it and was reading out the marked passages. They're wonderfully clever. Didn't you say your mother wrote it?"

"Yes. I'm very glad you think it clever. I—I suppose those people made fun of it?"

"Oh, no! On the contrary, it hit the nail too straight. Cynicism is quite the fashion now. I really think they were sorry when I insisted on bringing it back to you. Some of them are to ask for it in the next box from Mudie's.

"I hardly think they'll get it," I said, glancing at the date. "My mother died thirteen years ago, and this book was published the same year."

"You have neither father nor mother?"

"No. My guardian is my father's brother, and the only relative I have heard of. I was left to his care."

"Lord St. Quinton mentioned other relatives of yours, I believe."

"I have never heard of them," I said indifferently. Then I glanced at the clock. "Your train is almost due," I said.

"What a broad hint! Well, I suppose it must be good-by this time. Never mind the dusty hands, Miss—Paula. (I never think of you by any other name.) There are many white ones less clean!"

He took both of them in his own.

"Little girl," he said earnestly, "I'd like to think I should come back some day and meet you as I leave you now. But I know that's impossible. Only—if it's your fate ever to get into that world of which you've seen one specimen yesterday, don't let them corrupt you. They will if they can. A laugh or a sneer makes any good, pure feeling seem ridiculous, and one gets ashamed, and lets it fall into the mire. It's a pity—but I've seen it so often, with men and women both. We're such fools! We'd rather be called wicked than odd!"

He pressed my hands warmly once more, and looked down into my upraised eyes with strange earnestness.

"Again good-by—I hope you'll be happy—I hope life will be kind to you; very kind. I should hate to know you had made acquaintance with sorrow."

"But I suppose I shall," I said involuntarily. "Everyone does."

"Yes, you're right. Everyone does. But I hope your day's a long way off. Good-by again. I shall

send you that stuff. If you don't want it, pitch it into the fire—but if—you like me ever so little give it place about your home for my sake.”

Then he went; and I watched him drive off, feeling a little bewildered, and yet not at all displeased.

* * * * *
Merry and I eagerly watched the weather and the chance of the wind lasting.

When she came up to brush my hair for me the last thing, she informed me the frost still held out.

Then I remembered I had no skates. But she reassured me by the information that there were “lots at Herivale’s. More than they need,” she added.

I fell to studying my face in the glass before me with a new consciousness. I was used to it, having known it for my own these past seventeen years. Besides, I think girls are no judges of beauty. At school Lesley had been acknowledged our prettiest girl. Claire ran her closely in some opinions. I had never inquired about my own share in such opinions generally, or individually.

Merry energetically plying the brush caught sight of my intent eyes.

“You’ve a wonderful fine head o’ hair, miss,” she observed.

“There’s plenty of it,” I said. “But I’m doubtful of the color, Merry. Would you call it—red?”

“Bless your heart, no, miss. ’Tis a warm color, I grant, but run through with streaks o’ gold. Just look, when the light falls on it!”

She held up a strand, which certainly did glitter.

“’Tis a sort o’ livin’ fire,” she went on. “I never seed such a color, and it do go with your skin and the warmth o’ cheek, just as if Natur’ had meant it

should. Were you considerin' o' your looks, miss, when you were so grave-like? I shouldn't trouble if I were you."

"Oh, I'm not troublin'," I said. "Only I wish I knew if they were pleasing. At school I never bothered, but when I was among all those grand people at the Court I felt they were criticising everything about me—my hair, my face, my dress, my manners. It was horrid!"

"Perhaps they was envying o' them, miss. Not so onlikely. For the ladies' maids let out a lot; and what with buttermilk to wash their faces in, and stuff to make their hair golden, and color to put on their cheeks instead o' what Natur' puts into 'em, well, maybe they was a-wonderin' how you came by such pure flesh and blood as you've got. The gentlemen's eyes told you so, or I'm no judge."

I thought of Captain Conway, but flattering as had been his looks I could not tell if they were appreciative. All country girls had good complexions and clear skins. There was nothing unusual in my possession. For my own part I admired Lesley's dark hair and pale creamy skin and violet eyes a thousand times more than my own red and white tints, and coppery locks. However, as no amount of thought or skill could alter them, I knew I must be satisfied.

So after making Merry give an extra long brush to that strange hair by way of making it shine on the morrow, I dismissed her and went to bed.

I read a few chapters more of *Fenella* before I slept, and then put the book under my pillow by way of having something of *her* close to me in my hours of sleep.

When I awoke my first thought was of the weather, and I rushed to the window.

Crisp hard frost still reigned. The cold was intense. I returned to bed to await Merry and my morning tea with a delightful knowledge of forthcoming excitement.

Her face was also beaming. "'Tis just as you wanted, miss," she informed me when she entered the room. "But terrible cold. It's to be hoped you have some sort o' furs for wrappage as is the way o' the quality generally speaking, otherwise standing about by that Mere Pond will be the sort o' thing to freeze your very marrow."

"Oh, I've a warm coat," I said, thinking of a certain tailor-made costume of dark-blue cloth and sable that I had been measured for before leaving school, and as yet unworn. It would come in useful now, and so would the little dark-blue velvet toque that went with it.

I put on the dress for breakfast. I was in radiant spirits. I babbled nonsense during the meal to an extent that must have tried the professor's patience, though he was considerate enough to put up with it.

As soon as it was over Merry and I set off to the dispiriting croaks of Mrs. Graddage and her proverbs. They could not affect our spirits, however.

The air was keen as a knife, but the sun shone brightly over the hard, white road. Everything sparkled. A gossamer ripple of webs spanned the bushes, the robins chirped from the hedge-rows. Flocks of sheep munched the swedes cut and scattered in the fields. Above our heads the sky was blue as a sapphire. My feet danced along; I could have laughed aloud for sheer joy of living.

It was, as Adam Herivale had said, a long walk

to the Mere Pond, but I felt capable of one twice its length on that morning. Merry took me by many short cuts and twisting lanes, and at last I caught sight of the old farmhouse. It stood in a dip of the valley, the hills sheltering it to north and east. The house itself was built of stone, gray and lichen covered, as was the slate roof. The square porch was like a deep recess, and ivy grew around it and the latticed windows. The fields that stretched on every side were of course but dull brown patches at this time of year, but their extent surprised me, as did the farmsteads and barns and cottages which belonged, so Merry told me, to the farm acreage.

As we came into the road again we saw a figure before us engaged in driving a cow and calf into an enclosure. Merry touched my arm.

"'Tis he I told you of, miss," she said. "The old ancient man that claims fathership to my Gregory."

I looked at the queer old yokel with wondering interest.

He had got the animals through a field gate, and closed it. He turned toward us as he heard our steps. An old, wrinkled face of natural rusty red, a pair of deep-set, twinkling eyes, a thatch of gray, wiry hair under a battered old hat, these represented the famous lady-killer of whom I had heard.

"Good morning, father," said Merry, gaily. "A fine day, isn't it?"

He fixed his eyes on me, and touched the brim of his battered hat.

"The sun be shining fair," he said in a cracked, piping voice. "Come down out o' heaven, I should say, in form o' a maiden. A rare beauty, Merrieless, and puts you aside same as a extinguisher does a

light. Not o' your sort, neither. Why comes it you're in company?"

"This is my young lady whom I wait upon," said Merry, proudly. "Miss Trent up to Scarffe yonder. Surely you've heerd o' her by now?"

"Not to my remembrancing," said the old man. "But if this be her, she'll pass as a fine, handsome piece even among her betters!"

"Bettters!" snorted Merry, in indignation. "What betters should she have, being a lady in her own right, by birth and breeding and family?"

The old man hung his head, but his eyes leered knowingly under the shadow of his hat.

"You were allays a talkative female, Merrieless Hibbs," he said. "And if so be you'd 'a' given the young lady a proper introducing, I might ha' made her my compliments in better style. She's a dandy bit and no mistake. Be ye a-goin' to the farm, miss?"

"We are going to the pond," I answered. "Will the ice bear?"

"Fine. The young maister's been up t'ot this hour o' more, with stable lads to broom for him. And I do hear a carriage load o' quality be comin' down noontide. I reckon they'll not pass your young ladyship for merit in the way o' looks."

I laughed. And so pleased was he by that appreciation that he gave his old hat a jaunty twist, and pulled at his waistcoat until it threatened to reach his ankles as well as his knees.

"Trust my judgment as a man o' ripe years," he went on. "And not a shy one, neither. 'Tis a goodish bit o' mischief I've done in my day, but a bright eye and a rosy cheek were allays o' that seducin' natur', I couldn't but play to them."

"It's cold standin' here," interrupted Merry. "We'd better be gettin' on, miss."

"Hsh—hsh!" chuckled the ancient sinner. "'Tis afeared she be o' I makin' a loose speech hurtful to the feelin's o' modest females. But I knows my place where ladies is concerned, and I wouldn't cause the blush o' bashfulness to rise i' that comely cheek, so there's no need to haste away."

"You must think you're mortal entertainin', if we've naught better to do than stand listenin' to your rubbage!" exclaimed Merry. "Come along, Miss Paula!"

"You're but a second-best poor sort o' girl," snapped the ancient, with a display of one unprepossessing tooth, left, like a forlorn wreck of better things, in his upper jaw. "And forward, too. For 'tis the young lady should give you her orders, not t'other way about."

"It is cold, though," I said. "So good morning, Mr.—Blox. I daresay I shall see you again."

"Nawt a doubt o' *that*," he assured me emphatically. "A face like living sunshine, leave alone such a finely grawed figger, b'ain't the sort o' things as Gregory Blox forgets."

"You're an old sinner," said Merrieless, "and ought to be readin' your Bible, and thinkin' o' your latter end, 'stead o' talkin' onmeaning words. If my young lady was same way o' thinkin' as myself, she'd clout your old ears for your forwardness, but then I suppose 'tis your age makes things excusable."

I slipped a shilling into the wrinkled old hand, and laughed another good morning at sight of his astonished face and dropped lip.

He had a great deal more to say, but he said it to

our backs as we hurried off to the pond, skirting the quaint old garden that surrounded the farmhouse.

Another quarter of an hour brought us to the pond.

Several figures were moving about. Adam Herivale's stalwart form and broad shoulders were conspicuous among them. He saw us directly and came forward.

I shook hands with him. "You see I've come," I said. "What about the skating?"

"The ice will bear fine," he answered. "I've heard that the Quinton Court folk are coming down presently. This is the best skating place the country round. It's a sort of lake, though we call it a pond. But you've no skates, Miss Trent!" he added suddenly.

"No; I never thought of them, or I suppose I could have bought some in the village. It was very stupid of me."

"I'll run to the house and get you a pair of my sister's."

"But won't they require them for themselves?"

"There's extra ones," he said, "and an hour or two will put you into the way of it before the great folks come."

He turned swiftly and was off. I stood watching his rapid strides, when a piping voice at my elbow startled me.

"Ladyship," it said, "I've made bould to bring you these skatey-irons. I seed you'd none in your hands, nor that brazen lass o' yours, neither."

I looked round and beheld the ancient Gregory once again. He was holding out a pair of lady's skates, polished and sharpened, and evidently ready for use.

"Oh, thank you," I said. "But Mr. Herivale has just gone to fetch me a pair from the house."

He chuckled feebly.

"Like eno' these be the ones. Aye, aye, I seed him. 'Twas a most ungodly haste he was in. Not a 'good mornin',' or a 'fine day' in his breath. Don't be perplexin' your pretty head wi' any manner o' thought as to trouble taken for your sake, miss. 'Tis in the nat'ral way o' man to render service to woman, and when she's a handsome piece o' flesh and blood as makes a pictur' for eyes to behold, then the service is honorarry, so to say. Honorarry," he repeated, as if the ready-coined syllable pleased his ear.

"You here again, you old piece!" broke in Mer-ry's voice. "What manner o' business can you have with idleness? 'Tain't your play-time yet."

"I'm tired o' work, lass, and it would be a true comfort to watch the sportin' as goes on with the superior class. And the pretty ladies a-glidin' and a-slidin' to and fro, with their petticoats a-flyin' and their ankles twinkling. Warms the blood again, it does, Merrieless, and no harm because it do run a trifle quicker."

"Where did you get them skates?" she demanded abruptly.

Again he chuckled. "Found 'em," he said. "And borrowed the loan o' usage for her ladyship, your mistress."

"You'll get into trouble if you don't take care. The young master be just gone to get some o' the same."

"I can wait," said the ancient man, complacently. "There'll maybe come need o' me for the screw-work o' her ladyship's foot"—his eyes sought the

ground—"seein' as how machines o' this sort don't take nat'ral to the ways o' balance."

"Well, I can see Mr. Herivale and his sisters comin' along now," said Merry. "And you'll have to explain how you came by those skates. Such foolishness! For you can't put them on for my young lady, and even if you could, she wouldn't know the use o' them or how to stand."

"What are you going to do yourself, Merry?" I asked abruptly.

"Oh, if you won't take it as a liberty, miss, I was goin' for a turn with Gregory. He's found me a pair o' skates, and we'll keep out o' the way o' the gentry, miss."

"But can *you* skate?" I asked.

"Yes, miss, since I was a child. Though 'tisn't often I have the chance, bein' kept close in service, but a short time o' practice gives it back again."

"I'm very glad," I said heartily; "for you can keep yourself warm and have some fun on your own account."

"Hear that now!" exclaimed the old man. "There's kindness o' spirit! Take it to heart, lass," he added, fixing a warning glance on Merriess, "and offer your thanksgiving for such a sweet, unparticular mistress. You don't pick 'em up none too often these parts!"

CHAPTER XI.

ADAM HERIVALE brought his sisters to me for introduction.

Pleasant, bright-faced country girls of twenty and twenty-four years of age. The borrowing of the skates was explained and excused, and they were duly fixed, and I tottered forth, supported by Adam's strong arm.

I managed to stand and move about quicker than I had anticipated, but my instructor was very painstaking, and very patient, and, fortunately, I was lithe and active, and had no sort of *mauvaise honte* whatever. By the time the Quinton Court party arrived I could glide along quite respectably, holding Adam's hand.

He looked somewhat disconcerted as the waggonettes drove up, and a flock of chattering, gaily-dressed women got out with their attendant cavaliers.

"I suppose you'll join them?" he said, bringing me to a standstill on our quiet bit of the broad sheet of ice.

"Indeed I won't," I answered. "I want to learn to skate, not idle my time away with these people."

He gave me a quick glance. "Some of the gentlemen would doubtless be glad enough to take my place," he observed.

"Oh," I said huffily, "if you're tired and bored pray say so. I forgot I was keeping you from your own share of enjoyment."

He readjusted the hand I had pettishly snatched from his arm.

"My enjoyment," he said, "can never exceed the present moment, or the honor you are doing me. It was of yourself I thought."

"Don't trouble about me," I said carelessly. "I'm perfectly happy."

I had no need to ask whether he shared the feeling. His face spoke for him.

"There is a quieter bit up yonder," he said presently, as dots of scarlet and blue, and sealskin and sable, began to flit and skim over the polished surface.

"Up yonder" was a divergence, or dip of the pond, fed by some minor stream. A narrow slip, hard-frozen like the rest, beneath leafless alders.

He guided me there even as he spoke. One or two of the Court party flashed by us as we slowly moved. No one seemed to recognize me, however. The high collar of my cloth jacket came over my ears and round my face, the close-fitting toque left little of my audacious hair visible. I was glad when we reached the stream and were moving to and fro, he giving me less and less of his aid, I growing confident and surer of balance as the time passed.

We spoke very little, but I think he was in a mood of serene content.

"You make an excellent master," I said, after a pause of silence.

"And you a most creditable pupil," he answered. "I want you to try by yourself now. Don't be afraid. I shall keep quite close, if you should fall. I don't think you will. You've got your balance."

I tried, and being absolutely indifferent to slips and jerks and the usual accompaniment of any new

physical exercise, I had the gratification of being able to make some progress. It was very far from being that "swallow flight" and embodiment of grace described in books, but it was promising, and I began to feel my feet more under the control of my will than I had been of theirs.

"You must be tired," said Adam at last. "Let us go back now and I will take you to the house for luncheon. There's always a meal ready these times. The grand folk mostly bring their own things, but mother sends them tea, or soup, or ale if they want it. I promised for you that you'd come in and see my people."

I thought of the professor's words, "A good old yeoman family," and concluded it would be interesting to make their acquaintance.

I sat down on the bank, and he unfastened my skates. Just then I heard a gay voice hailing me by name.

"Paula!" it cried, "Paula Trent?"

I looked up and saw Lady Brancepeth hovering near us.

"So you *are* here," she said, as she glided swiftly across the dividing space. "I thought you would be. Where have you hidden yourself?"

"I've been having my first lesson in skating. This," I explained, blushing stupidly, "is Mr. Adam Herivale of the farm there."

Her eyes swept over his broad shoulders and stalwart figure, then rested a moment on his face, as he lifted his cap.

"I think we have met before, or at least I've seen you—riding, wasn't it?"

I caught an odd flash in his eyes, but I was ignorant of its meaning.

"Yes," he said; "the day you lost your whip."

"Of course! I thought I remembered your face. Well, Paula, how did you get on?"

"Not very well, I'm afraid," I said, rising to my feet, and feeling numbed and dazed after the skates had been removed. "But it's lovely. I hope I shall soon learn."

"Are you going home?" she asked.

"Oh, no! I shall stay here all day. I've been invited to lunch," I added, laughing.

"What!—in the farmhouse? How charming! Mr. Herivale, couldn't your hospitality extend itself a little further? I'm absolutely starving."

"I should be only too honored," he answered somewhat stiffly. "But I thought your party were always provided——"

"With luncheon baskets? So we are. I'm not going to inflict you with any others of the party. I'll chaperon Paula, and see your famous old house at the same time. I've heard something of its history."

He made no remark. I fancied he was somewhat discourteous to this lovely butterfly, but put it down to bashfulness. She asked him to take off her skates, and I thought such feet and ankles might have made a conquest of any male heart. She chattered away to me much as she had done on the castle hill, but an even greater sense of the incongruity of the world with these primitive scenes came over me, and I felt cross at its intrusion. As for Adam, he gave only curt monosyllables to her airy banter.

We found luncheon awaiting us in a lovely old room, wainscoted with oak, and having a huge fire of blazing logs to give kindly welcome, from a great

open fireplace. Steaming soup was brought in by a neat serving-maid. The table was liberally spread with cold joints, turkey, ham and meat pies.

Lady Brancepeth babbled delight. It was all so homely and unconventional. She ate so daintily, with such airy grace of finger touches, and movements of head or lips, that I watched her with a sort of fascination. I wondered if Adam felt the same.

It was impossible to tell from his face. It had grown expressionless, and his words, though studiously polite, were curt as tongue could make them.

Lady Brancepeth demanded the history of the farm, and he gave it her in the same formal fashion. He was a revelation to me in this new attitude of stiffness, and I longed to ask its meaning. From time to time his eyes rested uneasily upon me, and then turned to the door as if expecting someone to enter.

"I hoped I should see your father and mother," I said at last.

"They seldom intrude on company," he answered. "But if you wish it, Miss Trent, my mother would be very pleased to make your acquaintance. She has known of you for some time. I think your uncle mentioned your coming home for good."

I opened my eyes wide. "Oh, did he? I wonder why——"

Then I crimsoned to the temples, conscious of a foolish speech.

"When you have finished your luncheon," continued Adam, "I will show you over some of the old rooms, and my mother's parlor. She sits there a great deal. Her health is not good, and my father

is careful of her. They are truly fond of one another—my father and mother,” he went on more rapidly. “’Twas a love match at first and ’twill be that to the last. There’s no one in the world for him like ‘wife.’ He never calls her aught but that.”

He looked suddenly straight at the lovely face and lifted, insolent eyes of the fashionable lady at his board.

“It sounds foolish, I suppose, to your ladyship. But we commoner folks have very simple ways, and love and duty mean a great deal to us.”

She laughed with evident amusement.

“So I have heard; but pray, my dear man, do not call a family like yours ‘*common folk*.’ You are of the stuff that made England what it is. I wish a little of your blood could be infused into our effete nobility. We would be the gainers, I assure you. If it carried a few of your primitive virtues with it so much the better. The word ‘wife,’ as you said it, has a delicious, old-fashioned flavor about it that almost makes one believe in Lubin and Chloe, and eternal constancy. I wonder if you—take after your father?”

That little pause on the pronoun and the half-mocking, half-amused expression of those lovely turquoise eyes gave the question a second meaning.

He colored in an embarrassed, stupid fashion that made me angry with him. Why couldn’t he speak to this woman as he spoke to me?

“I hope I shall never do worse,” he said at last.

And again she laughed, that cold, little laugh I was learning to know.

“You look as if you held all the primitive virtues,” she said. “Love and constancy are part of

them. I foresee a second edition of Darby and Joan when it comes to your turn to make of life a pastoral idyl."

She rose from the table. At the same moment some more people entered, ushered in by the fine old white-haired man I had seen in church, and whose likeness proclaimed his relationship to Adam. He seated his guests and shook hands with me, and then bustled about, waiting on them and carving, and pressing hospitality in a manner that was delightful, because it was so evidently the outcome of genuine feeling.

Adam approached me under cover of the confusion.

"If you would come away, Miss Trent, I should like to introduce you to my mother."

I glanced at him deprecatingly. "What of Lady Brancepeth?"

"We do not want her, I fancy. Surely she will go back to her own friends."

"She will expect you to escort her."

He resumed the old air of courteous indifference. "I will do so after I have left you in the parlor."

"Very well," I said, "I'll tell her that."

But when I had told her I was surprised at the sudden anger in her face.

"Of course you can do as you please," she said. "But I expect your farmer friend to take me back to the pond first."

"Can't you find your way?" I asked.

"I am not as at home among pig-styes and cow-sheds as *you* seem to be," she said sharply.

I was puzzled at her tone and apparent ill-humor. She had been so radiant and smiling a short time before.

"I saw no pig-styes. You cross that paved walk, and then go through the garden."

"Thank you for troubling to explain, but I've no doubt Colin will be my guide when you can spare him."

"Colin?" I said stupidly, and then, understanding, grew scarlet with sudden shame and indignation.

"One name is as good as another—in Arcadia," she said, with her little, chill smile. "And I have a fancy for Colin."

I moved away.

Adam Herivale was standing in the same place.

"I think I will not see your mother to-day," I said. "Lady Brancepeth is eager to get back to the pond, and indeed so am I."

There was something proud and hurt, yet infinitely gentle, in those surprised eyes of his, but he only said, "As you wish, Miss Trent. Of course I am at your service."

I remembered the first time he had used those words, and had the grace to feel a little ashamed of myself. But it was too late to retract. I left the room, and heard Lady Brancepeth's clear voice behind me.

"I'll take your pupil off your hands," she was saying. "It is too bad to spoil your sport, and I think a girl gets on better skating with one of her own sex."

What he answered I could not hear, but when we were once more at the pond he brought my skates and put them on, and then, lifting his cap, left me with Lady Brancepeth.

Of course I could not get on at all, and I felt she took a malicious pleasure in making me look awk-

ward. Finally I lost my temper. "I wish you'd leave me to myself," I said. "I believe I'd do a great deal better alone."

"Poor little maid!" she said mockingly. "And is it Colin she wants?"

I snatched my hand angrily from her own.

"What makes you torment me so?" I asked foolishly. "You've quite spoilt my day."

She turned her brilliant eyes on my angry face and laughed.

"You baby!" she said. "Do you know no better than to give yourself away like that—'spoilt your day' because I took you away from a farm lout who, to my thinking, is decidedly presumptuous. Pray forgive me for not appreciating your bucolic tastes. Shall I go after him and bring him back?"

Again I flushed scarlet; the tears of mortification and pride rushed to my eyes.

"When you are a little older," went on my tormentor, "you'll know better than to display preferences so openly. Colin is very handsome, I grant, but scarcely a desirable *parti* for Professor Trent's niece. I've tried to prevent you from making yourself remarkable. You ought to be grateful, not angry. Your worldly experience is as yet *nil*. Be glad that anyone is interested enough in you to show you the ropes to handle, and the way to handle them. There is no mistake in life so disastrous as a false step on the threshold. I must call and have a chat with the professor about you, my dear. Meanwhile *adieu*. I'm going to catch up—Colin. Shall I tell him you are disconsolate?"

She skimmed off, graceful as a swallow, her airy laugh ringing on the air, where it seemed the sting of her echoing words still lingered.

CHAPTER XII.

I POTTERED about in a blundering, aimless fashion when left to myself.

I was conscious of intense humiliation and intense anger. Everyone else seemed to be flitting about in the enjoyment of various stages of ability, but I felt a fool. No one offered me a helping hand, and I was in mortal terror of falling. This was altogether a different experience from my previous ventures, supported by Adam Herivale's strong arm and skilful aid to balance.

"Hullo!" said a voice suddenly, so close that I started and would have fallen but for a hand that caught my arm.

"Near a cropper that time. Thought I remembered you. Don't seem enjoying yourself. Let me lend a hand—I'll get you along."

It was Lord "Bobby" who spoke, and for a moment the relief of a friendly voice was so welcome that I cared very little who was the speaker.

"Oh, *will* you?" I said eagerly. "This is the first time I've ever tried to skate, and I'm so stupid."

He took both hands crossways and we moved over the ice together.

"Wasn't there anyone to teach you?" he asked.

"Yes, but he's gone."

"Oh, must have been a damned ass! I—beg your pardon—slipped out. But why did he go till you'd found your legs?"

"Oh, I don't know," I said pettishly. "I *do* wish

I could do it. It seems so easy, and when anyone helps me I feel all right, but the instant I try by myself I can't even slide forward."

He chuckled. "Yes, 'tis a shaky sort of feeling till you get used to it. But you'll soon be all right. When we get out of the ruck you must try one hand."

"You're awfully kind to help me," I said presently.

"Not a bit. Deuced pretty girl—oughtn't to want for help, you know."

"Your wife," I said, "skates beautifully. Do you see her over there doing figures?"

"Oh, she's *AI* at *that*—runs 'em up, too! No paying, though. Don't suit her book."

This being Greek to me, I made no response.

"We drive separate teams, you know. Most people do. Ask no questions, told no lies; that sort. How surprised you look! Bet there isn't a girl in London don't know what *that* means. Tries it on, too, on her own, when her time comes. The women all said what a jolly innocent you were when you left the other day. By the way, Lorry (that's my wife) got hold of that book you left behind and read us out some eye-openers. Demn'd clever it was. If *that's* your sort o' reading you oughtn't to be so green."

I stopped—my face one burning flush of anger.

"That was my mother's book. She wrote it. I'm sure there's nothing wrong in it."

His pale, watery eyes met mine with unmistakable surprise. "Wrong! Who said it was wrong? D——d clever, that's all."

"You spoke of it as if it had quite another meaning to—to what it seems to me to have!"

"Didn't mean that—assure you. Jolly queer girl you are, conscience and all that, I suppose. Take my tip—throw it aside and face the world on your own. It hates goody-goodies. You're awfully fetching, but you'll never get on till you've thrown all that moral ballast overboard and taken life for no better than it is!"

I was speechless from indignation, and he guided me on and up to the spot where his wife was doing the outside edge and other mysterious devices, watched by a crowd of admirers.

She saw me with her husband and paused a moment to laugh.

"Why, Bobby," she said, "what's this? A new line?"

He grinned. "Shame to let Miss Trent stumble about and no one to lend her a hand. Besides—good example."

Her eyes flashed. "You never seem to want for male escort, Paula," she said. "It's odd how pleasant boredom can be made if one has—long eyelashes."

"Come along, Paula," said Lord Brancepeth, audaciously. "Don't mind her; she's in a wax about something. Let's have another try."

He bore me off, whether I would or no; but my face was tingling, and the smart of hot, indignant tears lay behind those lashes that Lady Brancepeth had alluded to so mockingly.

When self-control returned, I asked him to take me back to the chairs. I was tired and wanted my skates off. I glanced about for Adam, but he seemed to have disappeared. I caught sight of Merrieless, however, and signaled her to accompany me.

"What's made you freeze up so sudden?" asked

Lord Brancepeth, as we neared the bank. "Not a word but 'yes' or 'no.' Surely you don't mind what Lorry said. She's got a nasty sting to her tongue, but, bless you, no one cares for that. I expect she's envying the color of your hair, if the truth were known. It's the shade every smart woman's mad about. But I defy all the hair stuffs in Christendom to do what Nature's done for you!"

"As I'm never likely to go into your smart world, Lord Brancepeth, there's not much advantage in having the fashionable shade of hair," I said. "And I'm sure your wife is lovely enough, and admired enough, to envy no one."

"Oh, she's no angel," he said, "and, by Jove! she makes me sing small. Life ain't all skittles, my dear, take my word. On the whole I think you quiet country folk get the best of it. No debts, no show, no worries. We're sponged on, spied on, imposed on every way. Got to keep up in the race or be knocked under. All we do—known. All we spend, only good to other people; half ruined by extravagances, that aren't a ha'porth o' use to ourselves. Afraid of our servants, our tradespeople; all the beggarly, rotten pack who spy out our secrets and fatten on our incomes. Lord! how sick I get of it all sometimes."

"Then why do it?" I asked.

His laugh rang harshly on the frosty air.

"Why? Because we're fools. Because we must be in the swing. Because it's bred in our bones. Because we're like sheep and must follow on one another's heels! Oh! there's no end to the reasons once one starts on 'em. Why—even you, country innocent as you are, if you married into the set and went through a season, would turn out just like the

others. You must. There's no help for it. It's been set a-goin' and it'll go as long as vice and gold and vanity are in the world. How Lorry would laugh if she heard me talk — and well she might. I'm one of the worst o' the lot, and I've never cared who knew it or what was said of it. Oh, here we are. What a rum old card! Who the deuce is he?"

The ancient was standing guard over a chair. He must have seen me coming up, and was preparing to remove the skates.

"That's one of our celebrities," I said, laughing. "He's on the farm, and his years number fourscore and—something."

"Jove! Fancy living to that. Jolly sick he must be of it. Shall I take off your skates for you?"

"I won't trouble you," I answered. "The old man can do it, and here is my maid also. I'm very much obliged to you, Lord Brancepeth, for your kindness—and," I added, "your valuable information. Perhaps some day I may need it."

"I hope to God you won't," he said earnestly. "Well, if I can't do anything more, good-by."

I stepped up on the bank and seated myself.

The ancient Gregory became garrulous, and was just about to divest me of my skates when Adam Herivale flashed into sight and bore down.

"Let me do that," he urged.

In some surprise I consented.

"How did you get on?"

"Oh, very badly. It seemed no use trying."

"You really should not leave off until you have mastered it," he said. "Unless, of course, you're tired."

I was not tired, but I had lost all inclination to go on the pond again.

"If you would take me in to see your mother now?" I said hesitatingly.

He looked up quickly and his face flushed with emotion. "Do you mean it?" he said huskily. "I thought all these grand people had made you ashamed?"

"What nonsense! Pray don't think such a thing."

"I should be very proud, very happy," he went on, as he loosened the straps. "I wish you'd stay a bit longer. We could give you tea, and then I'll take you on again if you'll let me. And we'll be skating by torchlight. That's a pretty sight. You'd like to see it?"

I hesitated. "My uncle," I said "might be uneasy——"

"Oh, if that's all, one of the farm boys could take a message."

My face cleared. I did so want to be able to skate.

"If you're sure it's no trouble," I began.

"I wish you wouldn't keep on saying *that*. I'm a plain, homely man, and what I say I mean. If you've forgotten that night on the ruins, I haven't!"

I ignored any other meaning than that I chose to give his speech. "Very well," I said, "I'll stay."

As Merrieless came up at the same moment I told her my intention, and saw from her radiant face that it suited well enough with her inclinations. Then Adam slung my skates over his arm and we went back to the farmhouse.

He led me into the beautiful old kitchen, and then across a stone passage into a wide room quaintly

but comfortably furnished, and having a large bow window looking into the old-fashioned garden. The fireplace was wide and open like that in the room where luncheon had been spread.

Seated on a carved oak settle, beside the blazing logs, was a woman. White-haired, dark-eyed, with a sweet, placid face—a face that bore some dim likeness to Adam's—enough to show that she was mother to this stalwart, handsome man, even had not the soft welcome of love looked out so unconsciously from her uplifted eyes.

"Mother," he said simply, "I've brought Miss Trent to see you."

She rose and came to meet me, her hand outstretched. "I am very pleased," she said, in a soft, gentle-pitched voice. "Very pleased. I know your uncle, my dear. He has sometimes honored us with his company. Come and sit by the fire, and tell me how you like Scarffe."

Adam slipped away and left us together. I felt so at home, so charmed with her kindly, natural ways that I chatted of all and everything concerning my yet unimportant life.

It is only now, to-night, in looking back on the interview that I seem to realize how interested she was, and how gently she dealt with much of my foolish boastings and efforts at importance. Her great pity for me centred in the fact of my motherlessness.

"Men folks are very well," she said; "but it needs a woman to understand a girl's nature in its opening years—a woman who loves her."

Then all my foolish babble ceased, and I grew silent and listened to her, and was the better for it.

The same tranquillity that brooded over those

quiet hills and held the quaint old town in a charmed peace seemed to have found another resting-place here, in this old room, with this placid, tender presence.

It did me good to hear her talk. To hear of her youth and her first coming to this dear old home, and her husband's goodness and faithful love, and the smooth, unrippled surface of their wedded lives, which to this day had known no cross, or shame, or division. A different story this from that I had heard from the lips of a worldly woman; a different standpoint this gentle faith and honor—from that where disillusion viewed its social wrecks.

Paula's self-importance shrunk away abased—Paula's vanity, of whose dawn none was more conscious than herself, fell suddenly off like a discarded garment. Her foolish pride hid a shamed head before the simple, godly honesty of a peasant woman.

And Paula sits here to-night reviewing all the events of this eventful day, and knows that chief and more important than Lady Brancepeth's satires, or Lord "Bobby's" attentions, or Adam Herivale's kindness, or the delicious enjoyment of the skating by torchlight—successfully accomplished at last—was that quiet talk in the old-fashioned parlor of Woodcote.

All or any of these things may be means to an end, may have a future bearing on character, but for her own good, her mental and moral education, Paula must acknowledge that in that old parlor she heard higher wisdom, better, nobler things than life had yet taught her.

As I write this, I look up and see my face in the glass opposite.

Has Paula two faces? The one I know—the one I don't.

I have to lay down my pen and consider this point.

Something stirs in me as the sap stirs in bough and bud. Spring's miracle of wakening life is not more marvellous than the miracle of wakening Nature. My mind has taken an excursion into new realms; I see before me one hard, beaten path, but others diverge from it to right and left, and the signal-posts to each name only the paths, but *not* their destination. A strange sense of bewilderment, of isolation, comes over me.

What has touched this hidden spring? What has brought to the surface of my own knowledge the vague and unspoken possibilities which lie slumbering in my soul?

* * * * *

Beside me, close at hand, lies my precious book. A hurried impulse to dip into its pages brought forth this pearl of thought. Tired as I am I write it as footnote to my own confessions, and the day's adventures.

"When the moral force awakens, question its reason for so doing. It is a slumbering giant whose disturbance threatens all your future peace. Henceforth your warfare is a double one. You are attacked from within and without. Keep clear vision fixed upon one issue; there is only *one* of importance. The others are but side lines, to lead you astray, or leave you irresolute."

Oh, wise writer, why have you left me alone to clamber as best I can the steep sides of the hill Diffi-

culty? Why are you not here to aid me by your helping hand, your wonderful wisdom?

Did you make of your life as perfect and beautiful a thing as your words say it can be made? Do you, by some spiritual prescience, know aught of mine, and will those pages guide me? Your living thoughts—though brain and voice are dumb?

The great, white, silent world lies all around me. In all the silent house I hear no sound.

I know *now* how lonely I am!

CHAPTER XIII.

I WOKE up to a world of dazzling whiteness.

Snow had laid its pure enchantment over the hills and fields, and turned the castle ruins into a thing of magic beauty.

The sky was gray and heavy. All hopes of skating were at an end for that day, and with a sigh of disappointment I resigned myself to life indoors.

I awaited the post eagerly. Surely one of the girls might send me a decent budget by this time.

But the weather had affected even postal deliveries, and it was nearly noon before the letters arrived.

To my delight there *was* one from Lesley — a thing of many sheets, and promising joy enough to atone for the disappointment brought by the weather.

I read it by the drawing-room fire.

“You wonderful Paula! How did you contrive to get so much interest out of such a brief space of time? And a *man* already to write about, and to make interesting! I believe you are the one and only person who could answer the proverb about a silk purse and a sow’s ear. You have the alchemy of imagination, as we always said. Do you know, Claire and I could *see* you reading that book in the train, speaking to that handsome yeoman (don’t fall in love with him, my dear), and feel introduced to your grim old housekeeper and the dear old absent-minded professor!

"Is that a compliment? Take it how you please, but believe we are eager for more news of your surroundings. I wonder if you will go to the Court while they have that house party? I almost envy you your freedom. I get lectured from morning till night, and am obliged to imbibe perpetual doses of worldly wisdom and be drilled into the ways of society. We are going to the Riviera soon. My stepmother—(Lady 'Archie,' as everyone calls her)—and I. We are to stay with some friends of hers who have a villa at Nice. So, my dear old chum, I don't know when we shall meet, unless I can have you for a week or two before the season begins. I'm to be presented at one of the March Drawing-rooms. My dress is ordered already. In fact, I hear so much and see so much of the bustle and importance of fashionable life that I get bewildered. But I haven't your trick of presenting things, my Paula, so you must imagine them. We had a lot of people to dinner on Christmas Day. Some were relatives, some friends. But they were all very grand and very fashionable, and Claire and I were quite at sea among them. The women seem to think a great deal of dress. Most of those I have met are on the wing to the Riviera, or Rome, or Cairo. It seems no more to them to flit from one place to another than to cross the street. What a self-imposed treadmill society appears! Yet, though I heard people abuse it, they all declare they must go on with the exercise! I wonder if I shall like it when I too 'am in the swing'?

"Dear—it's too horrid not to be able to speak to you. I seem to have hundreds of things to say, but they won't stand being written down. However, I promise to write you long yarns from Nice, and tell

you all about the life there. Lady Archie says my great fault is that I'm so dreadfully *young*. I've a small step-brother here, but he's so hemmed in by nurses and rules that I scarcely get a glimpse of him. But he's a darling cherub, and, of course, his father's idol. As for Lady A.— Well, it's impossible to say what she thinks of him. She accepts maternity as another rôle she must play, and I suppose she plays it according to the best rules of society. I wonder what she's like when she's *really* natural. I'd like to ask father, but I daren't. He seems always in a haze of business and company promoting, and he's director on goodness knows how many boards—if you know what that means? I confess I don't. And Lady A. grumbles because Stanhope Gate is the wrong side of the Park, as if *that* can matter when one has horses and carriages at command.

“Now, my dearest dear, good-by. Keep on writing. I *love* to know how your days go on. Address *here* till you get my Riviera letter. Your loving and devoted old chum,
LESLEY.”

I put the letter back in its envelope and sat gazing into the fire. I had a budget upstairs ready to send off, so there was no need to write a reply.

I employed myself in measuring the distance between us that these few days of emancipation had created. It seemed to show that life was a very different thing from books. That the study of individuals was the real education. That mind reacted upon mind, and nature magnetized, repelled, or attracted nature. I thought of Lesley as I had known her — my girl friend and confidante. All that was fresh and simple and natural was, in her

new life, decreed foolish. That lovely youth, so eager, so pure, so unabashed, was to be put in leading strings, and dragged hither and thither at the bidding of worldly wisdom.

I pictured her among such women as Lady Brancepeth, such men as "Bobby." I did not like the picture at all. But I consoled myself by thinking that all the men and women in the fashionable world could not be like those specimens, though they were well born and well connected, and might be Duke and Duchess of Dorchester one day. From the "Lorely," with her fascination, her insolence, her curious recklessness as to what she said or did, my thoughts turned to Captain Jim. He had seemed her special property; she had bitterly resented his attentions to myself. Why? What business had a married woman to exact the homage of any other man? Why couldn't she be content with the husband she had won? Was it vanity or wickedness that drove her from the obligations of duty and decency? I could only surmise — as yet.

When I grew tired of my thoughts I went over to the window, and stood watching the snow which was falling thickly. I thought dismally of the prospect of being shut indoors, and wondered what occupation I could find.

I could do nothing more to the room, and again I felt the miss of a piano. That set me thinking as to how I should get one. Such a thing as a musical or piano warehouse did not exist in Scarffé. The next town of any importance was Wareham. But I could only get there by train, and must wait for a change in the weather.

I began to wish the professor would not shut

himself up so persistently in his study. I should have loved to talk to him.

From the professor to my mother, from my mother to her book, was a perfectly natural sequence of thought. I had not half read the book. I resolved to fetch it and give the rest of the day to its perusal.

* * * * *

I brought *Fenella* downstairs and began the sixth chapter of her confessions. I had an odd fancy that I should get at the individuality of the author by studying the book. The speeches put into the mouths of the characters must surely be the things she would have said herself—outcome of the thoughts she had thought. How, otherwise, would they have seemed so natural? Yet there was an occasional refutation of this theory in the self-mockery of some words. And *Fenella*, whoever she was meant to represent, was eminently heartless. To experiment with every nature she met seemed an absolute necessity. Then when she had learnt their depths or shallows, their capacity or inferiority, she would cast them aside. She could make herself so interesting, could seem to *feel* so deeply, that she deceived others into believing her the reality she appeared.

One man alone had had the courage to tell her his opinion, to strip her bare of all the flimsy pretences and coquetries that veiled what was really cold-heartedness. "You want to be loved," he said, "yet you've none to give. Your vanity has to feed on something. It matters nothing to you if that something be a man's very life. Go your way—I'll have none of you. You're naught but a jilt!"

Of course *Fenella* was indignant. Of course she

moralized and theorized, and vindicated herself to herself. She hated the man for using that ugly word. She threw cold insult in his face. She forbade him ever to seek, or speak to her again.

But it seemed to me that he, of all the men who loved her, was the only one for whom she really cared. He was not a gentleman in the accepted term. He did not move in the society she frequented. He was lowly born, but had raised himself to an accepted station by reason of wonderful inventive gifts. She appreciated her power over a nature that had hitherto been cold to feminine charm, but she was quite unable to respond to a deep, imperative passion. She had played with, tormented, allured him, till the whole rough energy of the man broke the filmy chains of polite endurance and he spoke to her face what others kept in their hearts. It was curious to trace the effect those words had upon her, even while she still pursued her career of triumph. Curious but painful.

I found myself praying that *that* experience had not been the writer's—not my unknown mother's.

Yet such vitality breathed in the words, the confessions were so absolutely *real* in their naked truth and scorn, that I grew sick with the fear they roused in me.

If this had been her life, if like this she had lived and suffered, and grown heart-desolate at last——

I closed the book. I could not bear to read more of it just then.

CHAPTER XIV.

"MERRY," I said, "bring the tea to the drawing-room at five o'clock. I'll try and persuade my uncle to come in and have some with me. He hasn't seen the alteration in the room, and it looks quite respectable in the fire-light."

"Respectable! 'Tis most uncommon butiful, miss," said my handmaiden with enthusiasm. "That I do say with all my heart, though Aunt Graddage she's done naught but grumble of vanities and 'puffed up with their own conceits,' every morning when we be a-dusting the furnishings. But the only word in my mind, miss, is 'Butiful'!"

I laughed, well pleased, for a kindly magician in the shape of "Captain Jim" had helped out my scheme in marvellous fashion. He had wired that a piano would come down from London selected by himself. This was followed by a letter in which he hoped my uncle and myself would excuse the liberty of his choice. Of course that was the only obligation, as he dared not ask permission to present it. A friend of his giving up housekeeping had had the piano from an eminent London firm for the short space of a year. The captain had selected it originally and thought it a pity it should go back to the warehouse or be sold for a quarter its value.

(I had mentioned forty pounds as the price my uncle would pay.)

So the piano had come, and my uncle gave me a check, and I dispatched it joyfully to my kind as-

sistant. There arrived also a huge case of lovely and wonderful things. A Japanese screen, Turkish embroideries, quaint little folding tables, silk-frilled cushions, and bales of tapestry and cretonne. These were the odds and ends of "rubbish" for which he had no use.

Treasures they were indeed, and with the memory of the Court rooms in my head, I set to work on my own drawing-room.

This had all happened during a week of snow and bitter cold and biting winds that kept me indoors. I blessed Captain Jim with a full heart for the delights of occupation. To-day everything was complete. A bright fire burnt in the grate. The cold, white marble of the mantelpiece was draped with rich-hued Oriental stuff. Bits of china and photographs relieved its former stiffness. The lamps had shades of crimson and deep orange. The piano—a semi-grand of Bechstein's—relieved the hard outline of the room, and cushions and draperies made couch and chairs presentable and ornamental.

Flowers and plants I could not, of course, procure, owing to the weather. But the lovely glow of light atoned for much, and I was very proud of my handiwork.

One of the little tables was laid with a snowy, embroidered cloth, and Merry brought the silver tray and china service, and retired for hot cakes and bread and butter, while I went to fetch the professor.

As I entered the study in response to his bidding, I saw him sitting by the fire in his old leather chair. The room was almost dark.

"Oh! you're not working! I'm so glad!" I exclaimed.

He peered at me through the gloom. "Is it you, Paula? No, my dear—I'm not—ah—working. I sit passive sometimes to think out my subjects and facts and data."

"I want you to work out some very important data for me," I said cheerfully. "Not *here*, though. I'm going to take you to my part of the house and give you a cup of tea. Come along, professor."

I saw his hand ruffle up his hair till it stood on end like a cockatoo's crest.

"Tea, my dear? Graddage usually brings me a cup when she lights—ah—my lamp."

"Which you usually allow to stand till it gets cold. I'm beginning to know your little ways. Now, please, just to oblige me, make a tiny change for once. The piano came to-day, and I've had the audacity to alter your scheme of furnishing."

"Mine," he said. "Oh, no! my dear. I had nothing to do with any furnishing. Except the—ah—arrangements of my study."

"Oh, then it *was* Graddage. I wonder why religion always associates itself with ugliness! She evidently made the drawing-room up out of lamentations and backslidings, and the eschewing of worldly vanities. The result was a success in hideousness. I've altered all that, and I want your approval. Do come."

He rose almost, I thought, with alacrity. I slipped my hand into his arm, led him along the hall and threw open the drawing-room door with a triumphant air. I was greeted on the threshold by Graddage. She turned on us, bristling like an aggressive eagle.

"I hope, sir," she exclaimed, "that you're not goin' to encourage such sinful vanity as Miss Paula

seems bent on showing. 'He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind,' as the wise man said."

"If he could say that after seeing this room he'd prove himself an extremely foolish one," I answered audaciously. "Do get along, Graddy. I want to show my uncle what improvements I've made, and give him a hot cup of tea for once."

"I take my orders, miss," she snorted, "from my master and no one else."

"Then give them, professor," I said, squeezing his arm gently. "And let us have a quiet, happy half hour before you go back to work."

He looked at Graddage, at the room, at me. His eyes grew wonderfully soft. "By all means, my dear," he said. "The invitation sounds tempting. My good Graddage, we will dispense with you for—ah—the present; the present. If you will be good enough to light the lamp in my study, I shall—ah—feel obliged."

I chuckled to myself. Graddy was not going to have everything her own way.

She tossed her head with its quaint cap, and darting a most unchristian-like glance at me, left the room.

I led the old man up to the easy chair by the fire, and seated myself opposite, beside the tea-table.

"We're going to be quite nice, fashionable people," I said, as I poured out the tea. "No one nowadays has tea in the dining-room on a table. It's always served like this. How do you like it?"

"It is—charming," he said, glancing round. Then he settled himself against the big, frilled cushions. "Charming," he repeated, "and very—feminine."

I laughed. "What else should it be, professor? A woman's touch seems an introduction to frivolities, but she has a knack of making the frivolities comfortable and pleasing, hasn't she?"

"In the present instance," he said, "I feel bound to—ah—agree."

"That's an old dear," I said. "I was half afraid you'd scold me."

He held his cup poised half way to his lips, and looked at me with sudden wonder.

"Scold!" he repeated. "I scold you! Surely, Paula, I never have done—ah—that?"

"Indirectly," I said; "only indirectly, professor. Perhaps disapproval would express your attitude better. You have seemed to disapprove of me sometimes."

"It was unintentional," he said. "I—you see, my dear, you have not on previous visits revealed yourself to me as a—ah—personality. You seemed careless, reckless, illogical. All faults of youth. They may have had the effect of hindering my appreciation of—better qualities." He finished his tea and put down the cup. "Better qualities," he repeated.

I brought him one of Graddy's hot tea-cakes, and placed the plate on the little dwarf table by his side.

"Are the better qualities coming out?" I asked.

"You seem to me," he said, regarding me seriously, "what would be called—attractive. You have—ah—many absurdities, as is natural to youth—feminine youth. You will grow out of them as your mind enlarges and your—ah—intellect asserts itself."

I felt interested. "Are you speaking generally,"

I asked, "or really of myself? ME—with capital letters. Paula, as she is spoke, you know?"

"Of you," he said, "as you are beginning to reveal yourself."

"That is very nice of you," I said. "Because it shows that you have begun to think of me as an individual; not a mere chair or table you find in your way. Might I ask how much of myself I have revealed?"

He looked at me, then at the room, the dainty tea-table, the open piano—back again to me.

"You have the purely feminine instincts," he said, "of decorative surroundings. The student sees so much with the mental eye that the outer faculties of observation grow absorbed."

"Are those instincts quite worthless?" I inquired.

"Far from it. Far—ah—from it. They serve to render trifles important, to polish—ah—the rough surface of surrounding objects. A young female thing" (I shuddered) "adorns herself because she takes pleasure in her appearance. She adorns her surroundings because they—ah—in a measure set off that appearance."

"Professor!" I cried reproachfully.

"I am not saying, my dear, that the care and time you have expended on these—ah—artistic improvements" (*that* sounded hopeful) "are wasted or un-instructive. But, in your present stage of existence, your eye demands more than your mind. You satisfy your eye at the expense of—more worthy objects."

"Dear professor," I said plaintively, "I am only seventeen."

He could not ruffle his hair any more, so his be-

wildered fingers brought it into its normal condition.

"I believe you are," he said. "Seventeen!" He regarded me through his glasses. "Your hair," he said, "is very beautiful, Paula. That brilliance is—ah—not quite usual."

"I hope you don't think I dye it?" I said, smiling.

"Do women do such a thing?" he asked innocently.

"Why, of course, professor; even I know that."

"It is like—her hair," he went on, bending his gaze on the fire. "Once, I remember, it all fell down. Like a shower of gold it seemed—a wonderfully beautiful sight. And how she laughed at my awkwardness because I could not put it up! It seemed—ah—sacrilege to touch it. But Stephen was not so stupid. He helped her."

(Stephen Trent was my father, and the professor's brother.)

"I should like to think I was like her," I said. "I have been reading her book. I thought it might help me to know her. Tell me, professor, can any one write without *being* themselves, and putting themselves into their writings? Mustn't it be partly what they feel and think, and how they would act under circumstances?"

"Not necessarily, my dear. Imagination plays a large part in fictional writing. Little traits of the author may creep in, but, as a rule, I believe the characters are quite—ah—impersonal."

"Oh!" I said disappointedly. "I have been studying her book, thinking it helped me to know her. And yet I am sure, quite sure, she couldn't have broken hearts and wrecked lives as that girl did."

"Not intentionally. You are right, Paula. Whatever harm she did was not of her own will—or desire. Her beauty was not even her greatest charm. It was that strange, winning, joyous temperament. The joy she gave, the light she shed. The constant surprise she was to herself, as well as to others."

He gazed into the fire and seemed to lose himself in thought.

Presently he looked at me. "You have her beauty," he said gravely. "But I do not think you will be as—interesting."

"Or as—unhappy?" I asked.

The change that trembled over his face was a reproach to my thoughtless words.

"Why should you think she was unhappy?"

"From her book," I answered.

He moved uneasily. "Her book is not herself. It is bitter, cruel, heartless. She was never *that*."

He rose and leaned against the mantelshelf. "Never *that*," he repeated. "She wanted to *live*; to make discoveries; to get at the root of life. Sex hampered her, and her beauty. Men were always around her—at her feet. To be kind and gracious, or even civil, meant ensnarement. She made so many unhappy, that at last she grew callous to unhappiness. I don't know why I tell you these things, child—you draw them out of me. She used to draw my thoughts out of me—also."

"Does it hurt you; does it make *you* unhappy?" I asked.

"No, my dear. Only sad—a little troubled because the old fear awakes again. Because you, her child, are in some way herself reincarnated. And you have to learn Life's lessons as she had. You are, as I said, only a child. You believe; you are

trustful. It is hard already to convince you of facts—stern, sober facts. But you will find out for yourself the truth of life, the reason of sorrow, the need of suffering. You may be a pleasure to others, yet a pain to yourself. For no one can live to and for themselves—least of all a woman.”

“I am glad you did not say ‘a female thing’ again,” I answered, as I, too, rose and rang the bell for the removal of the tea-tray. “And now I am going to ask you a favor. Will you sit here a little longer if I play to you? I said I wouldn’t touch the piano until you were by to hear it. It is only fair, after all, that you should decide whether I’m worth the money spent on accomplishments.”

“Indeed, my dear, it will be a great delight to me to hear music again. My solitary life has had few pleasures in it. I think—it seems—ah—to me as if you were determined to bring me some at last.”

I gave his arm a little squeeze, and set his coat straight, and then went over to the instrument. The tone of it enchanted me. I had never played on one so beautiful. I had a good memory and rarely played from music. Instinctively I abhorred fantasias and variations. I felt that the professor would like music that appealed; soft, dreamy melodies to whose rhythm his own thoughts might flow. So I gave him one or two of Mendelssohn’s *Lieder*, and then drifted to Chopin, that ideal writer for the piano. First the “Berceuse,” then one of the simpler nocturnes, finally my first and chief favorite—the Fifth. When I had finished I looked round at him. He was leaning back in his chair. His eyes were closed. I stole softly to his side, thinking he was asleep. But he opened them and looked at me. Then he held out his hand.

"Well," I said, smiling, "was it worth three guineas a term?"

"My dear," he said, "you have given me a great pleasure. Your playing is beautiful. Your music has a soul, Paula. A rare thing, my child—treasure your gift."

He paused and took another survey of me and the changed room. "It is like a fairy story," he said abruptly. "And I seem to have awakened from a long sleep, to life—and beautiful things. I thank you, Paula. You have been the fairy who has done it."

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN he had gone back to his study, and I sat alone in the changed room, I thought with pardonable gratification of his words.

I fancy there was a self-applauding Paula in the background, seeing herself as a beneficent fairy, and pluming herself not a little on already accomplished feats. But she spent a long hour notwithstanding, sometimes flitting to her piano, sometimes nestling among the cushions of the big basket-chair by the fire. But always with active thoughts, vivid imaginings as companions.

"He said I was beautiful," was one of the thoughts. "Another girl might feel vain—but I don't. I haven't even looked in the glass. It's no credit to myself. I can no more help it than I could help having a crooked spine, or a squint, had Fate so chosen to afflict me. My mother was beautiful also. He said she was loved wherever she went. Yet she was unhappy. No one who was not unhappy could have written that book."

I fell to wondering about my own life and its possibilities. I asked myself if beauty were a woman's greatest power. If a fair face had such charm for men that straightway they became the bond slaves of its possessor. History had told me the fate of many of the world's famous beauties. It had rarely been a happy one.

"After all, however much love a woman wins, she can only love *one* man," I said to myself.

A sudden memory flashed before me of seeing words to that effect written somewhere. My eyes fell on *Fenella*. I opened it and turned over some of its pages. Yes—here it was.

"Let a woman be ever so greatly loved, she can only love one of her lovers—at a time."

The horrid little cynicism of that ending was like a douche of cold water. I closed the book with an angry snap. Having once begun to think of love, I looked upon it as most girls look.

A "once-and-forever" sentiment. To repeat it, to give it second or third-hand, seemed a sacrilege to one's nature and one's instincts. Yet, after all, why should love be a thing of once giving only? Supposing it unworthy, unreturned, disappointed, why could it not withdraw into the heart once more, rest, and grow strong and wise by experience, even as the body grows again to health by proper care and rest and training?

Why, indeed? The newly discovered Paula theorized and pondered most wisely over the question; avoiding disquieting truths, building all the possibilities of her own future on the foundation of two fictional experiences. One was that of Etoile, the artist; the other—*Fenella*, the jilt.

* * * * *

Another week has passed, and I have settled into a comfortable groove of existence. So far as I can see, my life will run in this groove until I leave home for good and all.

(It may be for evil, suggests a little sprite that

often talks to me. Marriage is a lottery, and prizes are few.)

To-day surprise left a ripple on the placid-flowing stream. I was sitting in the drawing-room waiting the professor's appearance for tea, when Merry opened the door and announced, "Lady St. Quinton and Lady Brancepeth."

I was thankful the lamps were lit, and the room looking its best.

Lady St. Quinton greeted me warmly, and then glanced at the room. "Why, my dear," she exclaimed, "how charming you have made yourself here; I shouldn't have known it!"

"I think it is a little better," I said, as I released my hand from the cool touch of the Lorely's gray suède. "It could hardly have been worse."

I drew chairs forward, and they settled themselves and threw off their furs.

"Such awful weather!" chirped Lady St. Quinton, who was a gay, breezy little woman of forty years and juvenile appearance. "We've been quite prisoners! However, the snow's gone at last. I came, my dear, to ask if you would care to come to our theatricals next Friday. We've been spending these wretched days in rehearsing and getting up a comedy. We mean to inflict our neighbors with it now. Very short notice, but in the country that's excusable. There will be a little dance afterward. You must stay the night. I hope you'll come."

"I shall be delighted," I said. "But—" my face fell. I glanced at Lady Brancepeth, who was flitting about the room, with a tortoise-shell eye-glass impertinently adjusted, examining my screen and decorations. "I'm afraid I've no dress suitable," I hastily concluded.

"Dress!" She regarded me vaguely. "Oh, anything simple—you're so young, you know. Your maid might fix you up."

I thought of Merrieless and her clumsy fingers, and laughed. Just then an exclamation from Lady Brancepeth fell on the air.

"Well, I do declare—I'm *sure* it is. Where did you get this screen, Paula?" she asked sharply.

"It was sent to me," I said; "a present from a friend—going abroad."

She threw me an almost savage flash of her turquoise eyes.

"I could almost swear," she said, "that it was Jim's!"

I laughed softly to myself. Lady St. Quinton turned round, also produced a long-handled glass and surveyed the screen in question. "Those things are so much alike," she murmured. "Now that Tottenham Court road and Baker street supply them at—any price."

"Alike—yes," snapped Lady Brancepeth. "But I happen to know——"

Lady St. Quinton gave a discreet cough. "Perhaps it is a second-hand one," she suggested.

I gave no help. It amused me that the "Lorely" should forget good manners, and show curiosity and ill-temper over my insignificant possessions.

Lady Brancepeth came back to the fire and seated herself. Her delicate face was flushed, and her eyes had a hard, steely glitter. However, she said no more about the screen.

Lady St. Quinton reverted to the subject of my dress while Merry, who had brought in the tea, was arranging the table.

"A white gown; anything simple," she repeated.

"Hasn't she an evening frock?" questioned Lady Brancepeth.

"No," I said. "I've never required one; and I'm not 'out.'"

"Better send to town. You said your friend, Miss Heath——"

"She's gone to the Riviera."

"Peter Robinson would do you at very short notice. You need only send a pattern and measurements, and name price. They'd need a check on account, or a reference."

"Oh, I could manage that," I said gleefully. "And as it's to be white there's no difficulty."

"Don't have book-muslin," sneered the Lorely. "It's a little out of fashion."

"And don't forget to order the accessories," chimed in Lady St. Quinton; "gloves, shoes, stockings, lace 'undies'—all that sort of thing."

I felt apprehensive. I wondered if I could ask the professor for another check so soon. He entered almost on the thought.

I had never seen him in company before, and was a little surprised at his ease and courtesy. He seemed pleased at Lady St. Quinton's invitation.

"Most kind," he said, "most kind. My little girl has but a dull life of it here. It will do her good to have a little gaiety—and—see other young folk, like herself."

"I am afraid she won't do that," said Lady Brancepeth. "Your niece is singularly unlike most girls of her age, and—period."

I gave them tea. The professor took his cup in a careful, anxious way, conscious that the use of the dwarf table was not his to-night.

He held it for a moment, fixing a grave, searching gaze on the Lorely's lovely face.

"In what way, Lady Brancepeth," he asked, "is my niece different from the girls of her age—and period?"

"Oh!" she said airily, "she combines innocence and resource so effectively. As a rule, a girl limits herself to one or other. Paula should be a success. She is very clever."

"I think she is," said the professor, gently. "And will be—more so," he added. "But her cleverness is distinct from artificial trickery. She will think out her own course of life, and follow it."

He drank his tea amidst a surprised silence.

"I hope the course she intends to follow will be as admirable as her intentions," said Lady Brancepeth. "We generally begin well, professor."

"I am sure of that," he said earnestly. "I always like to think that, however life ends for a woman, she began it well. That the disasters, troubles, shipwreck are less her own fault than the fault of—circumstances."

"They are always the fault of—circumstances," chirped Lady St. Quinton, gaily. "We would all be successful—if we could."

She put down her cup and leaned toward him. "Have you considered," she asked, "the subject of Paula's 'coming out'? You know we discussed it once, and I——"

"I remember," he said. "You offered to undertake certain—ah—responsible duties."

"Yes—chaperonage. I have no daughters of my own, you know, but I like young girls about me. I should be delighted to introduce Paula, if you both wish?"

"She ought, I suppose, to see something of the life that other girls enjoy?"

"Of course. And a London season is a very pleasant thing. I go up to town usually in May. Three months of it are quite enough for me, I am such a country lover. But if I have such an inducement as the bringing out of a new beauty—and I will vouch for Paula being considered *that*—why, I would go up a month earlier."

My cheeks grew hot under this personal discussion.

"That is for you to consider, madam," said the professor, courteously. "I should say, from my own point of view, that three months of dances, late hours, hot rooms, perpetual excitement, was enough for any young woman in the year. But maybe I am old-fashioned in my opinions—no doubt I am."

"You, of course, lead such a very studious life, my dear professor. But Paula is young, and naturally looks forward to brightness and gaiety. I promise she shall have it, and I will look after her as if she were my own child."

"Thank you," he said. "I believe you will. I am glad it is settled. The—ah—business part of the arrangement we will discuss privately, at a future time."

He handed me his cup.

"And about the party on Friday?" went on Lady St. Quinton. "I suggested she should sleep the night. But if you could spare her over Sunday, professor, we would be charmed to keep her. It would be an opportunity to get acquainted with one another. Most of my house party are leaving on the Saturday, so I shall have my time on my hands."

"Anything that you consider best, and that pleases her, will be satisfactory to me," he answered.

Then his solemn glance wandered to the lovely, sullen face of the other visitor. He studied it in his classifying manner for a moment, then looked at me. "I suppose," he said vaguely, "I am doing what is best—for her?"

"Most decidedly," said Lady Brancepeth, sharply. "Every girl has a right to see life before she decides on her own place in it. Of course it will all seem very funny to Paula—at first. But if she is clever enough to observe, she will soon be clever enough to know the ropes. Once you've learned *that*—you can pick and choose for yourself."

The professor regarded the speaker with amiable bewilderment. "Ropes," he said; "I'm afraid——"

"Oh, you're not used to slang, of course. It's a way one gets into of talking. You see I'm so at home with it all, that's its second nature. But Paula——"

Lady St. Quinton rose hurriedly. "My dear Lorely, we must be going. Such a long visit. So delighted to have seen you, professor, and *so* kind of you to spare the dear child. My husband raves about her. I'll take the greatest care, I assure you—the *greatest*. Paula, child, you'll remember Friday. I'll send for you in the afternoon, and send you back on Monday. Good-by—good-by, professor."

They shook hands. Lady Brancepeth's slim fingers once more touched mine. Her lifted, insolent eyes glanced in the direction of the screen, then seemed to sweep over the shining crown of twisted hair about my head.

She dropped my hand and swept out, a mocking smile on her lips.

"Till Friday," she said, as the door closed on the *frou-frou* of trailing skirts.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE order for my dress went off to town that same night, and it arrived, with what Lady St. Quinton called its accessories, on the following Thursday morning.

In the evening I had a dress rehearsal, with Merriless for audience and critic.

To be assured that the gown was "fit for a queen-royal," that my arms and neck and throat were "whiter than the driven snow," was eminently satisfactory.

The glass in my wardrobe door afforded me a full view of myself, but the sense of strangeness at my changed aspect left me still doubtful as to whether that change was for the better. Paula in serge and tweed, I knew. Paula with a rough jacket and scarlet tam-o'-shanter on her head was also a familiar figure. But *this* Paula, with the sheen of ivory satin, with the exquisite flow of a *real* train, such as fashion plates advertised, with bare white throat and never flower or jewel to disturb the pure, harmonious tones of the white toilette—this was, indeed, a revelation!

Peacock-like, I drew my rustling train along the room to "get used to it." It would be terrible if any *gaucherie* confessed to those cynical folk at the Court that I and an evening gown were strangers to each other.

"There's so much in knowing how to *wear* your clothes," I said to Merry.

"There's not more in the knowing o' that than you're able to cope with, miss," she answered me. "You do look a real beauty, you do."

"Candle light," I said doubtfully, "is very deceptive, Merry."

"I'll bring the lamp an' you wish it, miss. And do let me call Aunt Graddage to see you. Such an adorned vision o' rare maidenhood ha'n't come her way this score o' years, I'll be bound."

"Oh, she'll throw the whole Book of Proverbs at my head," I said.

"Ah, true eno', miss. With her own heart as hard as a hazel nut, 'tain't to be looked for that she'll talk flattery to such a captivating piece o' flesh and blood! Well, to-morrow night, miss, you'll have finer tongues than mine to praise ye, though maybe not as honest."

"I've half a mind to go down to the study and show myself to the professor," I said, surveying myself once more.

"That I would, miss. 'Tis wonderful already what a power o' interest he do take in you. Quite a changed man he do seem when one is observing him."

I laughed gaily. "I'll try my charms on him," I said, "as he's the only male creature handy." And gathering up the trailing skirt I ran downstairs.

Half-way, I saw Graddage opening the hall door. I halted, wondering if she were admitting a visitor. Adam Herivale stood there, the hall light shining above him.

"Is Miss Trent——" he began.

Then his words snapped, and he looked straight up the stairs at me.

I had not recognized the full meaning of be-

wilderment till I saw his face. I had not learned the secret of a woman's power until I met the gaze of his eyes.

Graddage, following them, turned also. *Her* face was a study of grim disapprobation. "Whatever be you dressed up that sort o' way for?" she demanded.

But I took no notice, only ran down the few remaining stairs and greeted Adam gaily.

"Come in here," I said, opening the drawing-room door, and he followed me obediently.

"I've been trying on a ball dress," I informed him. "My first real ball dress. I'm going to the Court to-morrow to stay till Monday. And this has just come from town. What do you think of it?"

"I'm afraid I'm no judge of women's clothes," he began.

I interrupted.

"*Clothes?*" I said, with horrified emphasis. "Fancy calling this lovely thing *clothes!* Oh, Mr. Herivale, and you've been to London, and to theatres, and ceremonies, and you don't know how to distinguish Cinderella from—the princess."

"But you were never Cinderella," he said, smiling. "Though you do look a fairy princess now, I grant. It happens I came fortunately, though 'twas only with a message to say the ice was bearing again, and would you care to go on with the skating?"

"Oh, how lovely! But let me see—I go to the Court to-morrow afternoon. They're sending a carriage for me."

His face fell. "There's the morning," he said. "But, of course, coming to and fro is a bit tiring.

I'll tell you what, I could drive you from our place any hour after luncheon-time, if——"

His eye fell on my gown. "Oh, the dressing! I forgot that."

"But as the carriage is coming," I said eagerly, "I can send my box and come on later, as you suggest. You don't suppose," I added, "that I'm going there dressed like—*this*? They're to have private theatricals and then a dance," I rattled on.

"Private theatricals—and to-morrow night, is it? That explains——"

He stopped abruptly, and his hand went to his coat pocket. He took out a card and read out slowly:

"Lady St. Quinton. At home.

"Private theatricals. R. S. V. P."

"Why, that's an invitation," I said gaily. "And to *you*. Oh, do go! It will be so nice to have some one I like to talk to there."

"I thought nothing of it," he said, his grave eyes regarding me in perplexity. "A compliment, that's all. Same as asking us to the Christmas dance and harvest home supper, only they've asked no one beside myself."

"Well, *you* surely don't want a chaperon," I said gaily.

He smiled. "It's not that, Miss Trent; it seemed a sort of slight, passing over the others. It's never been done before."

I looked down at the point of my shoe, and wondered at his being so sensitive. "Then you're not going?" I said.

"I told you I hadn't thought about it again, but now——"

I looked quickly up. (Oh, Paula! are you learning your lesson already?)

"Well," I asked, "does *now* mean that you've changed your mind?"

He drew himself up, squaring his broad shoulders, and there were pride and a fine sense of manhood's due in his eyes.

"Miss Trent, though we don't rank with the county families, there's none older, few better than ours. And it's no pleasure to mix with fine ladies and gentlemen who treat me only as a farmer, no more, no less. By keeping to myself I can at least avoid impertinence."

"But surely if they asked you, it shows they meant to treat you as—on equal grounds, I mean."

"I should be only one of the crowd," he said. "Crushed into a back seat; treated as a nobody. A shake hands from my lady, a 'good-evening' from my lord. It wouldn't be worth pocketing my independence for such poor pay, Miss Trent—only——"

He looked at me again, from the glitter of my hair to the folds of the ivory satin train. "Only for—something," he went on hurriedly, "that could make up. If you treat me before all those grand folk as you have always done at other times I'm ready to forget pride. But I don't want to suffer your scorn as well as their indifference."

"My—scorn!" I laughed outright. I really couldn't help it.

Paula the Scornful, the Dignified, trampling on the fine feelings of an honest yeoman. The picture seemed to be irresistibly amusing. Then I held out my hands.

"Adam Herivale," I said, "don't put absurd ideas into my head. It's foolish enough without. Why,

if the queen and her court and hundreds of grand people stood around, and I saw you, I'd speak and act just as I've always done! Why shouldn't I? One likes a person for what he *is*—not for what he has."

"A sweet bit of wisdom," he said, releasing my impulsive hands. "God grant you may keep it, and your heart, too, in its innocent faith. But——"

"Now look here," I said impulsively. "Every one seems bent on telling me what a dreadfully wicked place the world is, and what a bad effect it will have upon me in particular. I really will not have you beginning the same thing. I must find it out for myself, and I mean to. Fancy, I am going to have a real season in town, and Lady St. Quinton is to be my chaperon. Oh, it will be lovely! I was nearly wild with joy when I heard of it."

His face looked so grave, so almost stern, that it was plain he did not share my enthusiasm.

"A season in town," he repeated. "And with Lady St. Quinton; that means her set—the sort of people up at the Court now; and you—thrown among them."

"Why not?" I asked. "Are they worse than other people?"

"I don't know much of other people," he said slowly. "But I know *them*. I'm not counted a gentleman, Miss Trent, and supposed to have only such feelings as are allowed to a clod, but if one of my sisters had received such an offer as you have had, I wouldn't care for her to accept it."

Indignation got the better of surprise.

"Do you know what you're insinuating?" I asked him, trying to amalgamate Paula the indignant with the innocent victim of his imagination.

"Yes, Miss Trent, I *do* know. I've never been a

man to walk through life blindfold. There's no innocence in being ignorant because you can't help yourself. Innocence is having a clean soul and keeping it clean when the world's doing its best to smirch it. And that's what the world does to every soul, believe me. It's not God's place; it's man's. And all the vileness of his thoughts, his greed for gain, his lust for power, his paltry vanities, his loathsome vices are there. 'Tis a seething furnace into which youth thrusts a careless hand and expects to bring it out unscorched. It never does—it never does!"

He moved restlessly across the room, back again to where I stood, dazed by the passionate force of his words. My foot rested on the fender bar as I leaned against the mantelpiece, my uplifted skirt showed the pearl-embroidered shoe whose fascinating toe I had been admiring. He came up to me again. His eyes rested also on the peeping foot, the glitter of the pearls.

"Could you walk along a miry road shod like that?" he said, "and come back without stain? I think 'twould be a hard task."

"But, Adam," I said—using his name without prefix, because it seemed so natural—"there's another way of looking at it. To keep one's eyes closed is to shut out the sunshine as well as the darkness. You said yourself that ignorance isn't innocence. Would you have me always blind because it's peace, always ignorant because it's safe?"

"Would I?" His voice was low and held a new earnestness in its deep tones. "Would I keep pure the lily that opened its heart on Easter morn? Would I hold the lamb from the hungry fox? Would I extinguish the flame round which the white moth

fluttered? Don't ask me, Miss—Paula, what I would do in such a case as any of these. I know only too well."

I felt the color deepening in my cheek.

Undoubtedly Adam Herivale's interest in me was growing apace. I felt intensely curious as to the nature of that interest. Did it mean the preliminary stage of a love affair? Was I to try my "prentice hand" on this simple yeoman before I took my flight to town?

A hundred odd and unanswerable feelings thrilled and fluttered within my heart. I would have given anything to be able to read his. Embarrassment held me silent. It was a relief when he spoke again in his usual even tones.

"I am afraid I have taken up a great deal of your time. I must be going. You will come to the pond to-morrow?"

"Certainly I will; if you will promise to drive me to the Court before five o'clock. But perhaps some of the party will be there for the skating, and then I could drive back in one of the wagonettes."

He looked less pleased at this suggestion.

"Of course," he said, "in that case, you must please yourself."

"And are you coming to the theatricals?" I asked, looking up at his grave face.

He hesitated. A little line puckered his brow, his eyes met mine doubtfully.

"It would matter little to you, I suppose?" he said at last.

"What has *that* to do with it?" I asked demurely. "You would surely go to please yourself."

"I might go," he said, "and yet not please—myself."

"Then, if in doubt, let some one decide for you."

His eyes gave a quick flash. "If—some one only would?" he said softly. "But it's asking too much."

"I will ask you," I said. "And you must sit by me and we'll talk about everyone, and have our own fun to ourselves. I get on much better with you than any of those slangy men."

"Thank you," he said, offering his hand. "I shall come, and—I hope the seat beside you may be possible."

"Good-by," I said. "I must go into the study a moment and show myself to the professor. I wonder whether he will see any difference in me? I suppose," I added doubtfully, "there is a difference. Do I look—taller? This is the first train I've ever had."

"You look," he said, "like a picture."

"Oh, I hope not! Because that's only paint and still life, and I feel very much alive!"

We were in the hall now, and Graddage appeared to open the door. She gave me a severe look, as if condemning my levity.

He took up his hat. "Don't catch cold," he said. "It is freezing hard. I shall look out for you about——"

"Ten o'clock," I said. "Good-by again, and pray the frost may last till I can skate properly."

CHAPTER XVII.

I OPENED the study door and peeped in.

"Enter Young Frivolity," I said, laughing. "Will Wisdom kindly pardon the liberty?"

The gray head lifted itself from the page over which it was bent. A puzzled scrutiny rewarded Frivolity's intrusion.

"Paula—is it really you?"

"Really and truly. Don't fine feathers make fine birds? This frock came down from London, and I tried it on to see if it was all right. Do you think I shall pass muster in the crowd to-morrow?"

I stood before him on the hearth-rug and dropped my train. He pushed up his glasses and surveyed me with a new uncertainty.

"You are very bewildering, Paula," he said. "You seem to me always changing. If it isn't a mood, it's a gown. But anything so radiant, so dazzling as you look to-night. My dear child, I wish your mother could see you now."

I forgot my dress, my appearance, everything. "Oh, why did you say that?" I cried, with sudden passion. "It gives me a heartache. And yet I should have said it first."

"You felt it—I suppose?"

"No, not till you spoke. I'm afraid I'm a vain butterfly, professor. I was so full of myself; I never thought of—her."

"It is only natural you should be full of yourself,

and happy. I think I never saw any face look as happy as yours when you came into the room."

"I *am* happy. I seem to have nothing but pleasant things to look forward to. Skating, and the party, and the theatricals and a dance. A dance with real partners—not girls or schoolboys. Yes, I feel very happy; I hope it will last. Was *she* happy, professor—my mother?"

A shadow crossed his face and his eyes wandered to the book on the table.

"Not always," he said. "No one is, my dear. One must not ask too much of life. She, too, was very brilliant. She could not be five minutes anywhere without exciting comment and attention. It was her charm. At first it seemed to surprise—ah—herself. But it became second nature."

"With all *that*," I said, "how could she be unhappy?"

"That is not for me to say. Women are strange creatures. They may have a great deal, but there is always one thing wanting—one thing they never get, so they say. She had her own theories. She often spoke of life as a torment and a struggle. A fight against an unconquerable fate. We stand on the borders of a Promised Land, but when life draws to its end the Land is still only—promised."

I gave a little shiver. Some of my content and expectation took flight.

"I will take off this finery," I said. "I am only wasting your time. But I thought I should like you to see me in my first ball dress. There will never be another quite the same, you know. And when it has been soiled, and crumpled, and danced upon and I have to throw it away—I wonder——"

But I couldn't say what I wondered, nor did he

ask. But I can write it here as I sit alone beside the dying fire, too restless to go to bed—scribbling with pen as well as with mind, for once. The thought that came to me so coldly was whether with the cast-away gown something of the wearer would also be thrown aside. Something of the glee and gaiety and girlishness that were part and parcel of Paula as she had been, when first (to quote Dr. Watts) “she put that covering on!”

* * * * * * *

An hour on the ice, with Adam Herivale to instruct and guide, left me almost able to depend on myself. I skated perseveringly till luncheon-time. Then I went into the farmhouse. I did not see Mrs. Herivale, however. She was not well, and confined to her room. The old farmer himself did the honors of the table, and was so genial and hospitable that I fell to admiring him, and wondering if his son would ever be doing the same sort of thing in the same way.

Some of the Court people came over for the skating, but not Lady Brancepeth. I heard she was busy rehearsing. Lord Brancepeth had left, and gone on to some other house.

So after all it was Adam Herivale who drove me over, and I arrived in a high state of nervousness just as the stable clock was striking five.

“Fancy having to go in and face them all,” I said, as we drew up at the entrance. “My heart’s gone down to my boots. I wish you were coming in with me.”

“That’s very kind,” he said. “But five minutes hence you’ll not be sparing a thought to me. Your courage is strong enough to face worse things than a few fine ladies. You’ll be telling me a different

story when nine o'clock comes, and I am thinking of a promise made last night."

"What promise?"

"Miss Paula—you haven't surely forgotten? Was I not to have the honor of sitting beside you for the theatricals?"

"Oh, yes! But you must look after me and the seat."

"There's not much fear that I'll forget," he said. "Till nine o'clock, then—good-by."

The door swung open. A blaze of light and warmth streamed out on the frosty air. A footman relieved me of my wraps, and I was ushered into the beautiful old hall, where a crowd of men and women were sitting, or standing about, taking tea.

Lady St. Quinton greeted me warmly. "You naughty child!" she said. "When the carriage came back without you I was quite alarmed till I had your note. So you've been skating all day. How did you come here?"

"I was driven," I said, taking off my gloves, and allowing her to lead me to a snug corner by the tea-table.

"Well, Paula," said a voice I knew well, "what knight-errant has been your next escort? We thought you'd thrown us over."

"I wanted to practise while the ice lasted," I said.

"Oh! and was the farmer your instructor again?" she asked insolently.

"Mr. Herivale isn't a farmer," I answered, feeling my face burn as sundry glances were directed at me.

"Oh, I can't draw fine distinctions," she said. "A yokel is always a yokel, even if his family date back to the Norman Conquest."

"You didn't seem at all averse to the yokel's company yourself, Lady Brancepeth," I observed.

She stared, then laughed shrilly. "I—because I had luncheon at the farmhouse. My dear child, if you make remarks like *that*, every one will wonder where you've been brought up. Your championship is a little out of taste, to say the least of it."

I drank my tea and said no more. I felt that I hated this insolent, lovely aristocrat who could be so rude and had a way of making me feel insignificant, ignorant, foolish, and only fit for the schoolroom.

I was thankful to be unnoticed, and I kept in my corner by Lady St. Quinton. But eyes and ears were keen. The one took in the harmony and beauty of my surroundings, the other the babble of conversation, the laughter, jest and repartee which floated around that group where the Lady "Lorely" queneed it so insolently.

No one noticed me except Lady St. Quinton, and she, after a few questions, left me to myself. I suddenly realized how utterly unlike these people I was, and the strangeness of a new atmosphere touched me with discomfort and shyness.

I felt almost sorry I had come.

The women were mostly in tea-gowns—lovely, dainty creations of satin and lace which seemed just suited to their attitudes and varying styles of beauty.

The "Lorely" herself, in some wonderful arrangement of turquoise velvet and old lace, looked a dream of aristocratic elegance.

But—to my primitive ideas—her voice, her laugh, and her perpetual slang seriously interfered with the charm of the picture.

* * * * *

I found myself in my own room at last. A smart maid knocked at the door and informed me that "her ladyship" had desired her to unpack, or render any assistance I needed. I gave her my keys and got rid of my hat at last.

The room was small but beautifully furnished. The dressing table a wonder of lace and satin, and cut-glass, and ivory boxes.

I took the deep padded chair by the fire and watched the grand London maid taking out my insignificant apparel.

Even my dress seemed less beautiful and artistic since I had seen those tea-gowns!

She laid it on the bed and placed all "the accessories" ready for me.

"Would you like me to dress your hair, miss?" she inquired. "I have half-an-hour to spare before I attend to my lady. Of course the theatricals to-night make us all busy, and dinner being earlier—"

I jumped up eagerly. "Oh, if you would!" I exclaimed. "Tell me, could you do my hair like Lady Brancepeth's? Would it—suit me?"

"I think almost any style would suit you, miss. But if you wish I'll do that *coiffure* easily."

I threw off my bodice and slipped into a dressing-jacket. In ten minutes I confronted a wonderful Paula, with waves of red-gold hair enfolding her head and shading her ears and rippling off her brow.

I gave a cry of delight. "It is lovely! How clever you are! Do you think I might venture to go down like that?"

"Why, of course, miss. Nature itself does all the work of curling-tongs for you, and a thousand times better!"

"Does Lady Brancepeth use *tongs* to make those ripples?"

"Why, of course, miss. They all do. Your hair would have taken me half an hour, only it waves natural."

I could have laughed for triumph, but I bethought me of dignity. "Thank you very much for your trouble. I think I can manage my dress; I've tried it on, and I know how it fastens."

She smiled. I could see a little pity for the "young person unused to a maid" lurking in that smile. But my head sustained me. I should look as well coiffured as the Lorely. That was something.

Alas, poor Paula! Her pride was short-lived. When she went down to dinner—horribly conscious of that rustling dress, that unusual magnificence—Lady Brancepeth was in the drawing-room and—*her hair was done in a totally different style.*

No wonder the flippant maid had smiled at my request. What I had admired turned out to be the careless *dégagée* mode, suitable for tea-gowns.

I went through dinner one scarlet blush of shame and misery. Those turquoise eyes were perpetually on me, and I felt they had read my foolish triumph and were laughing at its downfall. The man who took me in must have thought me the stupidest and most ignorant girl he had ever been told off to entertain.

I simply couldn't talk. As for the theatricals—I knew nothing of the piece or its meaning; nor did it interest me to learn that Lady Brancepeth was to do a simply "rippin'" skirt dance in the third act.

The light give and take of social intercourse was an unknown tongue still. I felt with a sort of

despair that I should never learn it. The way they caught each other up, finished sentences, turned phrases, made the most serious things a jest, bewildered me to-night as much as it had done at the luncheon party.

At home I was glib enough with my tongue. To Adam Herivale I could talk with ease and unflagging zest, but *here*. . . . Well, I felt that the position of mute at a funeral would have suited me equally well!

* * * * *

I am writing of all this days after it has happened.

I can look back now on those days as an education. Safe in my own home and my own room I have spent half the night with my journal. I remember so much that I dare not write half. I remember Adam Herivale and that I did sit beside him, while the comedy rattled merrily on, provoking perpetual laughter and applause, and winning as final verdict the assurance—"couldn't have been done better by 'pro's.'" I remember also my surprise that he looked so well in evening dress, and yet a feeling that I liked him better in his tweed knickerbockers and rough Norfolk jacket. I remember how quiet and self-restrained he was, and how I confided to him my "fish-out-of-water" feelings.

And the dance afterward—that stands out as a delight, though marred by a perpetual recollection of the Lorely's skirt dance in the comedy. What a wonder she was! She acted divinely; she danced as if trained to nothing else. She jested, laughed, coquetted like a girl whose heart was free. Yet I heard she had two children, and that one was a confirmed invalid from spinal deformity.

Lady St. Quinton told me this in the course of a long talk we had.

Almost the whole party left on the day following the theatricals, and I was not sorry to hear the Lorely's "By-bye, Paula—to our next merry meeting. Perhaps I shall find you've come out of your shell and are the belle of the season!"

I made no answer. But that same night Lady St. Quinton came to my bedroom, while I was undressing, "for a chat," she said.

The "chat" drifted into confidences.

She gave me doses of worldly advice and little sugar-plums of flattery to help them down. She succeeded in making me uncomfortable and distrustful, all in the kindest and most sympathetic way. She told me I had a "great opportunity" before me if I chose to grasp it.

"You could be an immense success if you chose. Your style is so uncommon. If you could graft a little of Lorely's audacity on to your beauty, London would be at your feet. You might marry almost any one. Men nowadays are mad for novelty!"

"I could never emulate Lady Brancepeth," I said.

"Oh, no! not at once; but you have no idea how easy it is to catch up that sort of manner."

"It would only make me artificial."

"It would be second nature before long. You are bright enough, and your uncle says you are clever. That should make you adaptable. Of course all girls are a little *difficile* at first, but that soon wears off."

"Will you tell me," I asked her, "why it is so necessary for a girl to be married, and why the

bartering of *herself* for wealth, or rank, or social position is lauded to the skies, while if she really loves the man she marries she is called foolish?"

"Because marrying for love alone is foolish, unless there is something else behind it. Girls are always romantic, but life isn't. Far from it. It is crammed with duties, necessities, obligations. It is most unwise to throw away a good chance for sake of a romantic fancy."

"A good chance meaning marriage—as the world looks upon it?"

"Decidedly. The world is wiser than a girl's experience. Besides, she can only acquire importance, influence, standing, by marrying well. What is the use of a suburban villa, and a pack of children, and roast mutton every day? That is mere existence, and a very unpleasant one. The greatest love couldn't stand it. If you wish to preserve Love, my dear, you must treat it as an idyl, and give it idyllic surroundings; unfortunately, that's very seldom possible. You, I think, are a little inclined to take it *au grand sérieux*, as you take most things. I should like you to laugh more and think less. The more lightly we take life the better it serves us. You should skim the cream and not trouble the inferior milk below. You get the best and let who may take the other. Of course every one can't get the cream, but there's nothing to prevent your trying for it. I'm telling you all this because I take a great interest in you. I've known your uncle for years, and he is getting to be one of the tip-top men of the day. It seems a pity you shouldn't enjoy life and have your fling like most young creatures. As for your question about *why* girls should marry, I say it is the best thing for most of them to do; the *only*

thing for some. What is an unmarried girl? She has no position. She is simply one of a picturesque crowd who look pretty and go to balls and cost a very great deal of money. When she passes twenty she is looked upon as almost old. A failure of three seasons is no one's choice. She must take a back seat. Then she's ready to marry—anybody—even a commercial man."

I laughed. "What is wrong with a commercial man?" I asked. "Lady Archie's husband is only that. And his daughter is my greatest friend."

"Nothing wrong," she said vaguely, "if it's in a big way, and pots of money in it."

"I see. A shop is a disgrace, but a wholesale warehouse is a distinction."

"Exactly. One needn't ever see the warehouse. It's in the city somewhere and has large dealings with foreign firms, and counting-houses, and clerks. And it means money."

"And anything that means money is accepted by the world."

"It is the biggest power in it," she said gravely. "Think of the Rothschilds, the Vanderbilts, the Pullmans—why, they could pension off our aristocracy and be none the worse for it."

"Are they any happier, I wonder?"

"Happiness is a vague thing, child. It has no distinct meaning. Every one interprets it as they choose. It is largely a matter of temperament, for what would make one person happy wouldn't affect another in the least. To one mind it is success, to another love, to another power. To some women the supreme distinction of being the most popular, or the best dressed, of her set."

"These things only express a very inferior sort of

happiness," I said. "Nothing to satisfy the soul or the mind."

"The seat of happiness is supposed to lie in the heart. I did mention—love."

"Then if there is a love that gives happiness it must be the best foundation for marriage."

"Love is only a sentiment. It passes."

"It has been a sentiment strong enough to bring out the best forces of humanity," I said. "To overcome even the fear of death. Look at the story of Juliet."

"Her love was purely a thing of temperament, passion, emotion, abandonment. That sort of love, my dear, makes a beautiful story, but it's no good in real life. Even the poets and dramatists recognize that, so they bury it among roses, and water it with tears. They know it would never stand the wear and tear of everyday existence. Romantic love is based solely on illusion. Neither the man nor the woman really are what they think each other. Better a thousand times to die, or to part, before the cold smile of reality gives the lie to fancied perfection."

"That sounds horribly cruel."

"It sounds what it is, child, believe me. If you entertain those fanciful, poetical ideas, which most girls do entertain, you will be most assuredly disillusioned unless you and your lover take refuge on a desert island. Even then you would bore each other to death in a twelvemonth."

* * * * *

She said a great deal more on the same subject, but the main part of the argument was always the same. I knew that her cynical speeches were only the parrot phrases of her world. I was learning

them rapidly myself. I began to think they were not meant for truths—only the assuming of a heartlessness that seemed the fashion.

I had partaken of doses of these cynical little pleasantries during my three days' stay at the Court.

I was quite sure Lady St. Quinton meant kindly. She had promised to "bring me out" and she did not desire her *ingénue* to pose as quite an ignoramus. Above all she wished me to entertain no prejudices. I must accept the world at its best, its *seeming* best, and do credit to my chaperon. If not, I should probably be left to rust in this small corner of seclusion for the rest of my days.

I thought of that corner even as I wrote. I thought of quiet years, of grave studies and simple interests, of human love and kindness and peace. Were these not better things than social success, a heartless marriage, the praise of worldly-minded women, the doubtful flatteries of men such as Lord Brancepeth, or Captain Jim?

For alas! Captain Jim had toppled off his pedestal. I had heard things which, to my ignorant ears, sounded odious. Had been told that he was the Lorely's bond-slave, and she would not allow him to pay attention to any other woman if she knew of it. That he had had to exchange his regiment and go abroad because he had allowed himself to be half ruined by her extravagances. It all sounded very horrible, and very wrong, but people had said it, and had said it suited "Bobby" to wink the eye, as he couldn't afford a "show-up" any more than herself.

Women hadn't scrupled to talk before me, and Lady St. Quinton had been very confidential.

"We've all got to take a mud bath some time or other," she had said. "It's best to get it over when

we're young. They say that that man makes the best doctor who turned sick on the first introduction to the dissecting-room. I suppose we are the better also for getting rid of our natural squeamishness. The mind offers us a dissecting-room as well as the body. It has as many diseases—and impurities."

* * * * *

"I wanted to know all about it," says Paula to herself—a tired and somewhat disgusted Paula—laying down her pen and turning over the scribbled pages of her journal. "I wanted to know, and I *must* know. There must be a better side to society—I shall look for it. To women, to men—I must find it. True, these women are nearly double my age, and experience holds no closed pages for them, but then they have commenced in a groove and stuck to it. But there is no absolute necessity to stick in a groove; one can claim freedom of limb and thought."

Paula grows mightily independent in her solitude, and draws pictures of moral strength and moral emancipation that are perfect works of art!

Paula—visionary, self-centred—gazes into the glowing coals and sees there images of life as it will be; as she means to make it. And it seems to her that the heart of youth is capable of anything, even as the face of youth gives the lie to art and artifice.

Had not the Lorely herself said in that comedy—"Youth!— That's what women hate most in others when they've lost it themselves. It's the one thing they can't compete with. The one thing that is real. It gives their complexions the lie and their lovers the truth! It mocks at washes and creams and face-powders, and points audaciously to the genuine thing!"

Well, Paula has "the genuine thing" as yet. How long will it last?

What says Fenella on that point?

"The dew on the grass, the bloom on the grape, the lark's first song of rapture, the spring's first day—these mean youth, and only these. So brief their beauty; so soon they are—not."

* * * * *

A long letter from Lesley came by the last post and it is still unread. I am too much taken up with all I have myself undergone, too much startled at the transformation from schoolroom to social training, too much absorbed in wondering and dreaming, to enter into the confidences of my friend. Already she has ceased to be *everything*. Already my heart craves more than a girl's affection and sympathy. It is as if from some immeasurable distance a hand stretched itself and touched my heart and my brow. The touch is cold, and makes me afraid.

And a voice from that immeasurable somewhere speaks to me out of the silence.

"When the woman-soul is born," it says—nothing more. Only that. I shall have to wait for the rest.

How long, I wonder?

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Is spring here?" I asked myself on a morning ushered in by a full-throated chorus of birds outside my window.

It had dallied so long with its coming. Had thrust forth here a bud on the hedge-rows, there a rosy blossom on the chestnut boughs, now a glow of flooding sunlight, then a nipping wind to counteract them all, that I hardly trusted this new promise, even as I feasted my eyes upon it.

"Poor things that live in towns," I thought, "and miss the march of the seasons! The expanse of such a sky as I look out upon, the rapturous greeting of birds amongst a cluster of blooms, the flood of sunshine like molten fire let loose, the sudden understanding of Nature's face as it smiles 'Good morrow.' "

Wide open was my window, wide open eyes and ears and senses to the message of the spring, wide open, too, the doors of my heart, for life was at its spring for me. I was happy because I was alive, because the world was beautiful, because I knew naught of sorrow, because before me there rippled a silver stream whose name was Hope, and every ripple was a promise. The perfume of wallflowers and violets came up to me, the daffodils were swaying on their long, green stalks. A faint mist of green was everywhere, through which the sunlight filtered. Spring had come at last!

It was early—scarcely six o'clock—but the invitation of the day was not to be declined. I accepted it without question, dressed and left the house ere even Graddage the virtuous had opened door or window.

The sap of spring was surely in my veins, for my feet danced along the field path, and I could have sung as the lark sang for joy of living in the beautiful world.

I took the road to Quinton Lacy, partly because it was so good a one, partly because I loved that bit where the old, old elms had made an avenue, and the castle could be seen between its two protecting hills. I leaned against a wooden gate and looked over the wide fields, faintly green with coming crops, faintly gold with buttercups and dandelions. The gray stone roofs and walls of Scarffe looked up as ever to their ruined monarch on his lonely throne. The dun-colored hills were brown, and a white road wound around and about and over them to the sea-coast beyond.

How beautiful it all was! How homely and safe and pleasant looked the little gray village amidst its sheltering hills! My stay here could be measured by months now, but I was in no way weary of it. On this April day I seemed to have awakened to a new charm in the quaint old place, a new beauty in the now familiar landscape. As I stood there looking at it, I threw a hasty glance back on these past months, and wondered what had made their uneventfulness eventful.

I had learnt to know the country east to west, and north to south. My guide had been—Adam Herivale. I had learnt to skate, and ride, and drive. My teacher?—Adam Herivale. I had had pleasant

teas in the old farmhouse parlor, long, quiet talks, learnt homely lessons from the lips of the mother of—Adam Herivale.

I stopped short and asked myself whether this recital wasn't getting rather like the "house that Jack built." Thought, too, with some sense of surprise, that I must have taken up a great deal of this same Adam Herivale's time and attention. The very horse he had trained for a lady's riding was at my service whenever I wished. Its owner, my escort also, whenever I wished. Did I need to go to the market town, to climb the highest hill, or explore the quarries, or find the best views, it was Adam Herivale who happened to be driving to the said town, or had an afternoon free for such exploring.

In fact, hardly a day passed but that we met somewhere, and the habit of these meetings had become second nature, so that I often found myself looking forward to them as a matter of course, even as I exacted or accepted all forms of service, also as a matter of course.

No one seemed to think any harm of it—even Lady St. Quinton, who kept a chaperoning eye on me at times. But she had rarely seen us together, and when I mentioned his attentions, laughed, and said it was "good practice" for me before I tried my powers elsewhere.

I kept my journal very irregularly now, and my letters to Claire and Lesley were much shorter, as indeed were theirs to me. My time seemed fully occupied. I kept up my music. I read a great deal—the Court library was almost encyclopædic—I rode or walked every day, when the weather was fine. I lunched often at the Court, and sometimes

spent from Saturday to Monday there. I lured the professor from his study every evening to listen to my music, or teach me chess, of which I discovered he was very fond. I worried Graddage, and amused myself with Merrieless, and in fact was as happy as any healthy, heart-free girl could reasonably expect to be.

Was I still speculative as to the meaning of things and their bearing on life? Did I still play at being Paula, and interest my mind over the dawning possibilities of her nature? I am afraid I must plead guilty. The habit of introspection was as strong as ever, but my ignorance of life had given place to a limited knowledge of its many-sidedness, drawn partly from books, partly from the admissions of the people who made up my circle of acquaintances. A queer mixture they were.

The professor, Lady St. Quinton, Adam Herivale's mother, Adam himself, his father and sisters, old Gregory and young Gregory, Merrieless and Graddage. Last of all, I learnt from the letters of Claire, who was "finishing" in Paris, and those of Lesley Heath, who had become a young woman of fashion!

This morning I reviewed my teachers and my lessons, and asked myself what benefit I had derived from either.

But the sunlight danced on the fields, the leaves laughed to the wind's touch, the birds sang on high in praise of spring, and—I did not wait for the answer. Off I sped again, up the hill, past more gray stone cottages, the almshouse, the old inn with the St. Quinton Arms swinging on its sign, to the left again and into the old churchyard, where the grave-stones were leaning at all angles, and where weeds

and nettles grew in every corner. From the highest point one could see the sea, deeply blue, smooth as a mirror; the white cliffs and green, pine-clad heights.

I perched myself upon the low stone wall and looked around. From the far-off sea to the quiet, old stones, holding dumb, distorted faces up to the serene heavens, my eyes wandered. In this grass-grown place lay those who had looked on this same scene, felt the lovely warmth of this same sun. The stones were old and moss-covered, the names on most of them almost undecipherable. Near to me one of them bore a hand with a finger pointing heavenward. It set me musing on faiths and religions, and the multiplication of sects that religion has created.

Had Christ said "In my Father's house are many mansions" from a prophetic knowledge of such sects and their manifold doctrines? For mansions must have doors, and if every sect taught that its own particular formula was the *only* door to heaven, why, the need of many entrances was explained.

Graddage, for instance, took the most gloomy view of religion. To her it was a thing of stripes and scourges, and heart-scorching and bewailing, of constant conviction of sin and backslidings. Piety with her was a moral purgatory. She courted suffering as others court peace. Her sins and the sins of those around her were ever present to her mind, and seemed the only food that sustained her soul. She was much given to prayer, and on a wet or cold Sunday would treat Merrieless and myself to a home-service conducted by herself. It seemed to me, however, that her prayers were the sort that ad-

minister a pinch of advice to the Deity, even while they supplicate him. She always knew what she wanted, and what others lacked, and took very good care to mention both.

From the sea my eyes roved over the leaning stones, and I read the inscriptions with some amusement.

Someone has said that "Graveyards are the devil's jest-book." I agree with him.

Such catalogues of virtues, such assurances of eternal joy and reward, such preternatural piety, such a curious medley of texts and lyrics — truly they were more capable of arousing mirth than convincing reason!

The old church was not used for service now. A new one, imposing and worthy of the ritual that it called Matins, and Evensong, and Holy Celebration, had been recently built. It stood on the hill overlooking the village, even as it overlooked its humble predecessor; seeming to say, "You are only parish — I am *the* thing!"

I got off my perch presently, and wandered round the forsaken edifice.

Rooks were cawing in the tower, the stone walls were yellow with lichen and green with patches of moss. It looked very desolate even in this warm sunshine. As desolate as age must always look and feel, it seemed to me, when life could mean nothing more but "waiting" for what would end life. I paused a moment beside a tiny mound. How very small it was! It had no stone to give it significance, only upon the green turf lay a little cross made of two twigs. I wondered what hand had laid them there to mark an unnamed resting-place.

A touch of sadness dimmed for me the spring warmth, the glad and golden morning. What had this little life done that it should have been so quickly eclipsed? Why had the heart that loved it been left mourning?

Those other grassy hillocks without stone or sign had not aroused my interest, but this small, nameless spot, with that roughly twined cross laid upon it, held a story of its own. I stood so long beside it, that I wrote one in my own mind. I daresay it was widely different from the original.

The loud crowing of a cock, the sound of wheels, the voices of carters and farm folk showed me that the village was astir, and I began to think of getting home. With brisk walking I could just do it by breakfast-time. I opened the gate, and went out to the stir and bustle of wakening life around.

The cottage doors were open; children ran to and fro to the pump, or tumbled over the doorsteps, or mingled with roaming poultry and foolish, barking puppies. The lovely sunshine rained its gold upon them all. The sky smiled its welcome. I nodded "good-mornings" as I walked down the street. So many of them knew me by sight, seeing me driving to the Court, or coming over from Scarffe for the Sunday services.

I reached home just as the breakfast bell was sounding and found the professor sunning himself on the doorstep. I told him where I had been. "It would have done you good to come too," I added. "Such a heavenly morning as this makes one content only to be alive and know one *is*."

We went in to breakfast. Beside my plate lay a letter. I saw it was from Lady St. Quinton. I poured out the tea, and then opened it.

"MY DEAR PAULA:—I intend to go to London next week. Tell me you will be able to accompany me."

"Next week!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

The professor looked up. "What about next week?" he asked.

"Lady St. Quinton wants me to go up to London with her."

"There is no reason why you should not do so."

"No—of course not. Only it is so much sooner than I expected. And just as the country is getting so lovely," I added regretfully.

"You will find a few trees in London," he said; "and flowers also. You will soon be consoled, my dear, for what you leave behind."

"I don't believe you are a bit sorry to lose me for three whole months," I said, looking at him. "You will be just as happy with Graddage as with Paula."

"No, my child," he answered, "I shall not. You have changed the routine of my life for me; and I shall always miss you—now. But I cannot sacrifice your youth to my old age and monotonous habits. Perhaps, my dear, you may not find the world all you expect. You may even grow tired of it and be glad to come back to this quiet refuge. It will always be ready for you, Paula—whatever betides."

I left my place and went up and put my arms round his neck.

"I almost think," I said, "that you are a little bit fond of this troublesome, vain and frivolous Paula, who plagues you so. A little—very little bit?"

"Yes," he said with a grave smile, "a—very—little bit. She has found that out, as she will find out many other things!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE old ruins were bathed in moonlight; a clear, translucent flood of moonlight that set them like carved ivory against their darker background. Out to them I felt I must go, and out to them I went.

Now—I tell myself I am desperately sorry, for this is what happened. I must write it down. It is an event, a landmark on that road on which my wilful feet are set. A landmark on which Paula sheds the tears of a first regret.

* * * * *

The night was warm and the air sweet with scents of spring. I passed through the street on my way to the castle, and soon stood below its ivied towers, listening to the babble of the stream, the rush of the water that once had filled the moat.

And suddenly there strode through the shadowy spaces a tall figure, and a familiar voice gave me greeting.

"I *had* to come out," I said. "I couldn't help it. Such a night; isn't it glorious?"

"Yes," he said quietly, "most beautiful. I, too, found indoors was not the best place. I wonder if you have noticed that I haven't seen you for two days?"

"Haven't you?" I said. "Well, very soon you won't see me for whole weeks, and whole months, so it's well to get used to it."

He made no reply for a moment or two.

"I'm going up to London next week," I added; "sooner than I expected."

"And you are—glad?" he asked. "Of course; your voice says it. What else should you be?"

"Exactly—what else? Haven't I longed and planned and thought and *dreamt* of it all this time? Of course I didn't expect to go quite so soon, but Lady St. Quinton says my dresses will take some time to get ready—so we are off next week."

"Will you walk round by the old mill road with me?" he asked suddenly. "I have a message to leave at Widow Vye's. I should have gone this afternoon, but hadn't time. It's not above half a mile."

"I know—that sweet, old cottage with the red berries growing over it. Some people say she's the oldest woman in Scarffe."

"Yes, she's ninety-two, and has never been out of the place in her life."

"Gracious! I should call that stagnation; and don't they say queer things about her? That she's got second sight and can tell fortunes by cards? Merrieless told me so."

"It doesn't do to believe the country gossips," he answered. "She's a queer-looking old thing and a very fair representative of a witch, as we think of witches, but I don't fancy there's any harm in her."

We had turned from the bridge and taken the road at the base of the hill. The moonlight was so radiant that we seemed to walk on whiteness; every leaf shone like a jewel, and the rose and gold of blossoms wore their colors as by day.

"It might be June," I said, looking starward and drawing a deep breath of fragrance; the air was

heavy with it—chestnut and hawthorn, wallflower and elder-bush, primroses and hidden violets.

"Oh, isn't it lovely—lovely—lovely! Like bathing in dew and moonlight, with all the fresh scents of spring thrown in!"

"Your feet almost dance," he said. "I suppose you are perfectly happy, Miss—Paula?"

He still hesitated between the use of Christian or surname, though I had frankly dubbed him "Adam" since the skating days.

"Happy? I should think so! I have everything I want, and everything to look forward to."

"And yet," he said slowly, as he met my eyes, "do you know you made me think just now of what Savage Landor meant by 'That sad word—joy.'"

"Sad!— What a paradox!"

"It needs some thinking; but, though I can't express it, I can feel the meaning. You will too—some day."

A sudden memory of that morning and the churchyard came to me, and I saw again the little, lonely grave and the cross of twisted hawthorn twigs. A momentary shadow fell across the road, and my dancing feet grew quiet.

"I never thought of 'joy' as a sad word. But—I suppose there is another meaning to it."

"Or to whom we apply it."

"Adam," I said irrelevantly, "I was up and out before six o'clock this morning. Where do you think I went?"

"I cannot tell—not *there*?" glancing up at the castle.

"Oh, no; quite away. To the old church of Quinton Lacy."

"A strange, dreary place to choose on a spring morning," he said.

"I like contrasts. The difference between that acre of the dead, and the miles of spreading woods and fields and sea, was just what I needed to check a too great love of life. Once they had been as I was; one day I shall be as they are. I stood for a long time by a tiny little mound—it seemed new. What struck me about it was that someone—the mother, I suppose—had made a little cross out of twigs and laid it on the grass. Nothing else. No name, no flower, just the cross."

"That—touched you?" he asked.

"It made me think, Adam. Made me remember that life may be very short as well as very long—incomplete, as well as satisfied."

"Would you like to know the history of that little grave?" he asked. "It is a very simple one."

"Yes; tell me."

"The child," he said, "was but a year old. The mother a dairy hand on our farm. She fell in love with a soldier, a recruiting sergeant; he was looking about for likely men to draft into the army. She was very pretty, and very vain. I don't know what tale he made her believe. She told my mother they were married, but that her husband had been ordered abroad. I never caught sight of him after the mischief was done. A little child was born—and from that hour the mother changed; pined, drooped, died. We took care of the little one, but suddenly the life seemed withering in it also. Perhaps 'twas its mother it needed. Nature has wonderful ways, Miss Paula. But, anyway, we couldn't rear it, and—it followed her. 'Tis its grave you saw."

"But who put the cross on it?" I asked, looking up at his face, and wondering at its gravity.

"Maybe a friend," he said quietly.

"Adam!" I cried, "I know. It was *you*."

"There's no harm in that, is there, Miss—Paula? Perhaps 'twould hurt the poor soul to know that no one gave a thought to the babe, even though I hope and trust 'tis safe in her arms once more. For God couldn't part love like that, though man made scorn of it."

"Scorn!" I repeated.

"Perhaps 't isn't the sort of story I should be telling you, Miss—Paula, but the man was bad; a liar and—worse. Dolly wasn't his wife. He was a married man."

I felt my face flame. "Is it possible that any man could be so wicked?"

"I'm afraid there's plenty o' that sort o' wickedness going about," said Adam, gravely. "All the world over it spreads; among the great as among the humble; among the rich as among the poor."

I was silent for a space. "Adam," I said suddenly, "if I had never liked you before I should like you for that thought of the little, dead child. It shows you have a kind heart."

Impulsively I stopped and held out my hand. He took it, and his eyes flashed with a new light.

"Don't be saying such tender words to me, or I mayn't be strong enough to hold back what that heart's so full of," he said huskily. "Full to overflowing—full to the uttermost meaning of what you call—tenderness. And I know I mustn't speak—I daren't. You must know life first before you'll learn the true meaning o' *love*."

"Love!" I said. My heart gave a sudden, quick

throb. The stars and the radiant night whirled dizzily. The scales fell from my eyes at last, and I knew into what I had been drifting.

A pall of shyness, coldness, distaste fell over me and all the natural joy that had held me hitherto. I didn't want—this. Joy of youth, of life, of all that Nature painted for my soul's delight, these I needed, but not—love. Not what I saw in a man's eyes, a man's face—something imperative, demanding, compelling.

I shrank back in a sort of terror. So may a child shrink back when the match, carelessly thrown, kindles a blaze that will devour a household. It seemed as if every force within me rose to repel this undesired assault. Fancy, imagination, romance, all the flimsy web I had woven around my friendship for Adam Herivale lay in tatters about my clinging arms; but those arms would not relinquish their hold. They strove desperately to wind the tattered shreds around an image of self-respect. They clothed coldness with an airy grace.

"Yes," I said eagerly, "it is life only I want to know. Nothing else, Adam."

His face lost that fevered glow, and grew calm and quiet as of old.

"Nothing else," he echoed. "But the meanings of life are many. One by one you learn them only to wish you had never learnt. For all that they give is nothing to what they take. The best things, the pure dreams, the happy, sinless days, the love of God and Nature. The faith in what is best in man or woman. Oh, Paula! if you gain the world and lose these—you are beggared—and my heart is broken."

"I should be sorry," I said, "to hurt you, Adam,

in any way. We have been such good friends. I am content to be that—but nothing more. It never entered my head that you would want us to be different."

"Because you think I am not your equal socially."

"No, I never gave *that* a moment's consideration. Because I don't want to love, or hear about love, or be troubled with lovers. Not yet—not ever, perhaps. It means so much."

"Yes," he said, "it means pretty nigh everything."

We walked on to the echo of that sigh of his. And the sweet, white, magical world had a shadow on it now, and Paula's feet no longer danced.

* * * * *

One thing more I must write here before I close my journal to-night.

We reached the old woman's cottage very soon after those last words; reached it without breaking silence. An old tumble-down place it was. A stream divided it from the roadway, and a wooden plank served as bridge. It was bowered in creepers and held by ivy, and the old thatched roof and quaint windows were things to delight an artist's heart.

A light burned in the window, shedding a glow of scarlet through the crimson glaze of the blind. It wavered over a scrap of garden, and lay like a thread along the tiny foot bridge.

Adam held out his hand. "Let me take you over," he said; "it's only a frail bit o' plank, but though the stream's shallow there's no need to get your feet wet. I happen to know the 'tippitty' way of it."

I also got to know the "tippitty" way of that

plank; but a spring, and Adam's strong hand landed me safely. He knocked and we entered the cottage.

A lamp was on the table, and a fire burned in an old, rusty grate, with its two wide hobs. Sitting in a deep, quaint chair, with wooden back and sides, was the old woman of whose fame I had heard. She lifted her head as we entered. On the table before her lay a pack of cards spread out and covering a considerable space. Oh, that ancient, ancient face! Oh, those strange eyes set back in shrunken hollows! Yet it was a face alive and keen, and full of gnarled meaning, like the twisted roots of the old tree that sheltered her cottage door.

She answered Adam's greeting cheerfully.

"Ye bain't come for the rent? 'Tain't ready; nor likely to be."

"No," he said. "But, if you remember, we were to do a bit o' repairs come spring, and father can spare a man to-morrow, so I came to tell you."

"My hearty thanks for your trouble. And is it courting time come spring, wi' you? A likely enough lass, but not for you, Adam, lad. A meal for your betters; a dainty piece, too! Will you hear your fortune, miss? I'm main good at the cards. Many's the luck I've told, and the sorrow too. You're happy now in not bein' happy. But there's changes comin', dark as storm on summer's day. Shuffle the pack, miss, and cut."

I hesitated, then glanced at Adam.

Her bleared eyes shot an angry spark. "'Tain't o' him you need take count, only your heart's nat'ral instincts. You're not set on matrimony—" (as she turned up the card I had cut) "try another."

I obeyed, now grown curious as to what I was to hear.

"Bold eno' you be to fight your own battles—'tis a strange wilfulness. There's journeys and changes—many a one, and a proud heart grown sore, and the keeping o' pride and the keeping out o' other women-folk. And men—scores o' them followin'—look at the cards—but no thought o' carin' for one. There's a woman, golden-crowned like yourself—she brings you a power o' trouble; and there's one who bears you no good will. Beware o' her. You'll know her by an eye o' blue—blue as that bit o' chaney, which has known nigh two-score years o' my shelf."

She pointed to the quaint old figure of a mandarin set above the smoke-blackened mantel. "Beware o' that woman," she went on, placing card after card, and reading them like a printed page. "No good will she ever do you, or the man who owns her, or the children she's borne him."

"Come, come, widow, that's enough o' that stuff," said Adam. "You'll frighten the young lady, and after all 'tis better she should find things out for herself than be told to watch for troubles. They'll come, if they *are* to come."

"You've but a barren sort o' knowledge, lad," said the old woman, peering again into the outspread pack, as they lay before her. "I'll speak o' your own fate presently, but let the young lady hear and take warning."

He laid a sudden, imperative hand on the cards and drew them all together. "No, no. I tell you I won't have it."

She looked at me, and her eyes twinkled. "You be bold eno' to face troubles," she said. "When the hour comes that you want to know aught o' man that hurts, or woman that hates, come you here, and

old Marthy Vye will tell you way and ward against misfortune."

* * * * *

Our walk home was silent and uncomfortable. He bade me give no thought to what the old woman had said, but yet I felt he was remembering it.

I, for my own part, was nursing a grudge against him for this sudden spoiling of our friendship. I liked him so much that I had no wish to like him more. I had grown so used to him in the position he had held, that the attempt to alter that position disconcerted and displeased me. I could not help feeling embarrassed. I avoided his eyes, and tried to keep our restrained talk on impersonal subjects. I felt half angry that we had met on this special night. If I had only gone up to the ruins instead of loitering on the bridge we would not have done so, and there would not have been this dull, strange feeling in my heart as I write; there would not have been that sense that I had not dealt fairly with Adam—that he had had a right to blame me.

For when we parted, and I had said, "Please forgive me if I have caused you any pain," he had laughed somewhat bitterly.

"'Tis a pain you'll cause many a man," he said. "Maybe you don't mean to, or can't help it, but it's hard on them that love, to look back on a long road o' flowery beauty, and find they've but trodden stones."

* * * * *

So I have found a lover and I don't want him. I have found "love," and given it the cold shoulder!

What makes me remember suddenly that book of confessions, and find myself confronting another life, love-haunted and love-besought, and also in-

capable of giving anything worth the name in return?

My reasoning faculties array themselves against a too vivid impression of some inherited instinct, but in the background I feel that the instinct is strong enough to defy even my own rebellion at its existence.

I seem a narrow-minded creature; cold of heart, critical and faulty. A hateful, unlovable, miserable, regretful Paula—and the first blot on my journal is the blot of tears.

CHAPTER XX.

THREE days have passed in a bustle of preparation and letter-writing. In none of those days have I seen Adam Herivale.

This afternoon I walked over to the farm to bid his mother good-by. She was sitting in her parlor, her chair drawn up to the open window, so that the spring scents and warmth and beauty should reach her as she worked.

"Have you heard," I asked, "that I go to London to-morrow?"

"My son made mention of it," she said, looking up from the sock she was knitting for that son. "I hope you will have a pleasant time, my dear, and not quite forget us in spite of the pleasures."

Her kind eyes looked at me as if asking had I learnt Adam's secret.

She had a face whose noble beauty made every emotion beautiful also. Some faces distort expression, or caricature it; others turn it into an exquisite meaning.

"I shall not forget—you," I said with emphasis.

"You will be with grand folk, and very gay and going to parties and balls every night — eh, my dear?"

"Yes."

"'Tis oftentimes with worldly pleasures the devil sets his traps. I hope, my dear, you will not be altogether ensnared. You're fair o' face, and sweet-tongued, and the manner o' you is bewitching. It

would beguile any man into thinking he was much to you."

"Oh, Mrs. Herivale!" I gasped.

"It's your way, child, and you can't be helping it. I'll not deny that it's a very pleasant one, though harmful. But maybe that's no fault of yours."

I felt my face grow suddenly warm. Could Adam possibly have told her?

"You'll be having sweethearts and thinking o' marriage, no doubt," she went on placidly. "I'm thinking 'tis now you'll feel the miss o' your mother, my dear. The best friend you can have is never what your own mother can be. She goes back and asks her heart the same questions you are asking yours, and by its joy, or pain, or the disappointment of her own life, she finds material eno' to guide her tongue to wisdom."

"I have no mother," I said earnestly. "Although she has left me a legacy of wisdom. But I have to find out its truth—much of it is so bewildering and so cruel."

Her eyes looked up questioningly.

"It's all in a book," I said hurriedly.

"There are things written in books to mislead as well as to guide, my dear. I would not be putting too much faith in man's wisdom."

"What about woman's?"

"Maybe she has a clever brain and keen senses, is quick and ready to argue, or to feel. But ever and always 'tis her heart makes her danger. Many and many a one has crossed the bridge of faith, all hope and gladness, only to find on the other side a black and dreary waste. No Promised Land o' Glory."

"But if she doesn't cross the bridge she can't tell what lies beyond," I argued.

"True, my dear. And I often think 'tisn't meant she should. For love is a good thing, and a woman needs it; even if it brings sorrow and tears, 'tis better to have known the cause o' the sorrow, the smart o' the tears, than gone through life with its one great need unsatisfied."

"You," I asked, "have never wanted to change your fate?"

"Never," she said emphatically.

"Never wanted to get away from these surroundings? The even, constant routine of weeks, and months, and years?"

"Never. God placed me here for a purpose and a duty. I have tried to do His will."

I looked at the sweet, placid face, the busy fingers. I thought of the splendid physique of her children, the devotion of her husband, the charmed circle of home-love of which she was the centre, and I told myself she had made of life a nobler thing than I should ever do.

Morbidity of thought is self-destruction. It withdraws the healthy root to analyze its component parts, and then replants a cutting!

I shook myself free of a tendency to disagree with Divine orderings of commonplace human events, and told her I was sure she had chosen the best part.

All the same, though I might have repeated her life, lived on here beloved and honored and safely sheltered from the world's temptings, I knew I should never have been content. I wanted so much more.

She, like Adam, had been satisfied to let Nature teach her, and Nature never permits us to feel and analyze at the same moment what it is we feel. She draws us along with the flow of her own current—

that living, rushing, throbbing current that is existence and joy in one.

Mrs. Herivale talked on and I listened, as I always did; and left her, soothed by her sweet, wise words. She never spoke of evil things; of human passions let loose without restraint; of riddles of thought and feeling, forever seeking answer, and getting none; of torments of self-investigation; of all those torturing, bewildering things that had come to me of late without desire of my own. Fruit of what I had read, and heard, and imagined—of three months' mental growth.

What height should I have reached ere the next three months had passed? Ere that "quiet autumn time" of which she spoke should find me here again?

I took the short cut home across the fields, asking myself these questions.

The sun was near setting, and its red glint was over the brown hills and quiet meadows. I looked about, wondering if I should meet Adam. If I did not, I should see him no more till I returned. That long talk with his mother had left me in an almost penitent mood—penitent for havoc wrought in this quiet, well-ordered life. I should like to have looked once more into that frank and kindly face, to have felt that warm, strong handclasp, to have heard him say "Godspeed."

Even as the thought came I looked up and saw him crossing the next field. He was near enough to see me. I felt sure he did see me, but he made no sign of recognition. Only it seemed to me that he hurried his steps, and leaping the low stone wall, passed on and up the road that led to Quinton Lacy.

I stopped dead. I could scarcely believe my eyes. Then his figure passed out of sight, lost in a mazy

confusion of light and shadow as the twilight descended from the circling hills above.

My pride rose up in arms. To be ignored; "cut" in this curt, unceremonious fashion, and by a mere farmer's son! A man who had been the willing slave of my every caprice for months past.

It seemed incredible. Was my offence so great, or his pride so hurt?

I had penetrated a little further into the realms of reality than I had bargained for. But to be taught that my power was short-lived—that my proffered friendship could meet such discourtesy—these things stung and rankled. I did not like them.

I had assured him he would soon forget, but I wanted to teach him how to do it, not receive a lesson from him instead.

Swiftly and with burning cheeks I went my way. I had a frightful sense of bungling absurdity. I tingled from head to foot with shame.

"How the girls would laugh," I said to myself. "Oh, how they would laugh!"

But I don't feel like laughing. And yet I write it all down here! Not for the girls, though—they must never know.

* * * * *

Merrieless brushed out my hair to-night. I saw the reflection of red, reproachful eyes.

"How it's to be borne without you, miss—the texts and the preaching, and your sins o' backslidin' forever thrown at your head!—I don't know. Aunt gets that irritating that 'tis more than mortal patience can stand. 'Tis well eno' for her to preach o' vanities with a clay-cold man laid to rest in churchyard blessedness; but she's known the state o' life, and worn the badge o' lawful matrimony, and

hasn't no manner o' right to find fault with others for seekin' similar timely pleasures."

I laughed. "Suppose it wasn't a pleasure or 'timely'? Perhaps she's only warning you to be cautious, Merry. Men are changeable creatures, you know. Fire before marriage, and snow after."

"Well, snow be easy melted, miss, and my heart's a warm one."

"Then if the snow melts what would you do?"

She looked puzzled at such pursuing of metaphor.

"I ha'n't thought so much o' the matter out, miss. Nor do I be believin' such ill o' a man as has loved true and faithful nigh upon two twelvemonths."

"Do you want to get married, Merry?" I asked.

"Oh! that is putting the matter in a way to make one bashful, miss. No right-feelin' woman ever says she *wants* the ordinance o' matrimony for her own experience, but she's just waitin' to take it if chance do bring it her way."

"Then how long do you want to—wait?"

"Gregory he be talkin' o' this coming Christmas, miss; wages and a cottage bein' conformable, and the work at the farm certain."

"Next Christmas! Oh, Merry, what shall *I* do without you?"

"That's payin' me an honor as is not my due, miss, for there be girls in plenty for service; and it's not out of the probable that you might be marryin' too."

"Oh, no, Merry!" I said hastily, "not in the least likely. I don't want to be tied down to a man and his will. That's what happens when you get married, unless, of course, you quarrel and go each your separate way."

"That not bein' true and hon'able matrimony, miss, as considered by the Church Service."

"I suppose not; but I'm afraid it's not uncommon."

"What's taught you this side o' the matter, miss, if I may make so bold?"

"Books—modern novels—and modern women," I said.

"Well, my showings for it are only my feelin's, miss, and they do counsel love and obedience, and patient bearing with the man if he's not too contumacious. Then a handled broomstick is not a bad sort o' corrective, specially if he's in his cups, as most o' them is when talkin' to argufyin', and retainin' wages as ought to be for the wife's right o' spendin'."

"Dear me," I said, "I can hardly fancy you with a broomstick, Merry, chastising Gregory. The old one, now, might deserve it, but not your swain."

"The old one is sobered down a bit o' late," she said. "Rheumatics caught a hold o' him, and he's all o' a groan instead o' a cackle. That cheerful soul o' his came down wonderful meek when he had to have his limbs liniminted, and his beer stopped. And talkin' o' the ancient sinner—'twas Gregory all but gave him a clout for the darin' words o' you, sayin' you'd been and jilted the young master, and made him a sort o' pictur' o' misery that scarce knows his business when he goes to do it."

"How dared he say such a thing!" I asked furiously, as I gave my head an angry jerk that sent the brush flying. "Do you mean to say that it's farmhouse gossip that I—and Adam Herivale——"

"Were as good as courtin'. Yes, miss. They're poor, ignorant folk and don't take much account o'

difference in stations, and young Adam Herivale was most worshipful, miss. Anyone could see that 'twas love wi' him whatever it might be wi' you."

"And they *dare* to say I jilted him?"

"'Twas the word, miss; but him that spoke it is but an ignorant, unlettered man as looks on life but one way, and that's his own."

I had scarcely known what real anger was as yet. There had been nothing to call it forth but the little tiffs and quarrels of school-life.

Now, however, I felt aroused to wrath, hot and indignant.

Paula's anxiety to stand well in everyone's estimation, Paula's desire to be praised and appreciated, met with a rude shock.

A jilt!

That odious word to be applied to *me*! To think that I must go forth from my first conquest branded with so hateful a designation.

Must a girl accept a man's love if she accept his attentions? Is one only the precursor of the other? At what critical moment should she draw back? How learn the signs when friendship drifts to love? How tell a man you do not need him, and spoil his happiness, before actually allowing to yourself that it *is* happiness you are spoiling?

I dismissed Merrieless, having no further inclination for her quaint babble—dismissed her, and gave myself up to my own thoughts.

* * * * *

To-night I closed a chapter of my journal and a chapter of my life. It saddened me, amidst all the glamor of expectation, to think that I closed them with remorse.

PART II.

The Fruit of Knowledge.

CHAPTER I.

Is Paula a fool?

It is Paula herself who asks that question of herself, three months later.

What have these three months held?

More than my journal could chronicle had I chosen to write down day by day, hour for hour, the lessons that life was teaching. More than I care to say even as I resume my old habit of scribbling.

More than I *can* say even to Lesley, who has come back with me for a week's visit before her marriage.

Yes—Lesley is to be married, and I—according to a long-ago promise—am to be one of her bridesmaids.

She is making a "great match," so Lady Archie told me, but I am sure that she is being coerced into it by some of those invisible forces applied to girls, whose whole duty, according to Society, is to make a brilliant marriage.

Lesley's will be a brilliant marriage. Lord Lynmouth is one of the "catches" of many seasons, and has hitherto escaped all the traps of matchmaking

mothers and guileless *débutantes*. Yet he fell a victim to Lesley, and though I appreciate his taste, I abhor him.

That is the worst of friendship! It has to be cut asunder by some knife of disapproval. It is impossible to agree on every point. Certainly impossible to agree on the choice of the man or woman who first divides it.

I know *my* Lesley, *my* chum, *my* school idol will never be to me what she has been, once a husband claims her; once she takes up that position to which her marriage will entitle her.

We had seen a great deal and yet very little of one another in that season I spent in London. A time at which I am now looking back critically, conscious that to write the truth of it will make me seem a somewhat vain and essentially fickle young person.

I wrote no journal there. My days were too crowded, my leisure too rare. There is no doubt that Lady St. Quinton gave me what Americans call a "lovely time."

I rode and drove with hundreds of others who rode trained hacks, and adorned cee-spring carriages. I danced, and dined, and "at homed;" meeting persistently the same set of people, and hearing perpetually the same sort of talk. I was satiated with music, and grew critical as to fashionable pianists and vocalists. I was taken to see pictures which gave me but a poor idea of modern art, and had learnt to give opinions on men, manners and morals which invariably made the recipients laugh, or declare I was "rippin' good fun," or as exhilarating as a glass of champagne.

For, with all her rusticity, Paula was essentially critical and exacting. Vapid speeches, unconvinc-

ing compliments, never satisfied her. She wanted something very different.

She had two proposals, formal and definite, and about a dozen undeclared and indecisive confessions of what might have meant love, had she so chosen. She did not choose it.

The same spirit that had interested her in Adam Herivale interested her in those London men, up to a certain point. Beyond that she would not go, and nothing could tempt her. In vain Lady St. Quinton urged that a brilliant marriage would make of her a *perfect* success!

Paula preferred to be an imperfect one—as yet.

* * * * *

I went to town labeled “jilt”—I have come back an acknowledged coquette. And all because I *will* know the full meaning of those simulated passions, those professed attachments; the homage that is at once incense to one's vanity and shame to one's better instincts. None of these men could move me beyond a certain point. When I reached that point I began to analyze them. It was not that I had raised a standard of excellence to which I expected they would attain, but that I sought to know their own standard, and found it so poor, or so trivial, that I felt nothing but contempt for the competitors.

I saw no harm in leading them to self-betrayal, because I considered a woman had every right to know what sort of a bargain she was making when she deliberately put herself and her future into a man's hands.

He might choose a wife for her beauty, her fascination, her wealth even, but she should choose no man for external advantages of physique or posi-

tion. So as I dismissed my suitors with calm indifference, I received many a lecture from my chaperon.

"It would be so advantageous to come back next season a young married woman," she urged. "It is the era of the young married woman. She has all the admiration and all the prestige, and all the opportunities denied to the mere girl."

"Those seem odd incentives to marriage," I answered.

"You have surely some ambition. You don't look the sort of girl to go through an uninteresting life."

"I hope to get a deal of interest out of it—before I marry."

"But you are throwing away such good opportunities. You have offended so many men. A man hates to look a fool, and you lead them on till they are sure you mean acceptance, and then you refuse them."

"Because I don't care to marry one of them."

"Why not? There's Tommy Yelverton."

"Tommy Dodd, as they call him—a young man with but one idea, and that's himself."

"He has acquired another of late, and that's—yourself."

"Well, the idea is all he will acquire, for I would never marry *him*."

"Mr. St. Aubyn, then. He's a rising man, and you like politicians."

"He's such an echo of other people's opinions, and so selfish."

"How do you contrive to find out the worst points of every man you meet?"

I laughed. "I don't know. Perhaps they don't

show me their best. I like to draw them out, and they — apparently — like to confess. I've heard Tommy Yelverton's own opinions of Tommy Yelverton, and very funny they are. That millionaire from South Africa, Reuben Goldstein, first told me how he made his money, and then enlightened me as to the feat known as going on the 'razzle-dazzle.' I believe that meant spending the aforesaid money idiotically, by the help of—other people."

"Paula!"

"Well, dear, you asked me, and I am explaining. Carlton Clyde, again, who you said was *épris*, only used to talk about his success at 'bac,' as he called it, and the scandals retailed at the Bachelors'. That rich young American, who was going to marry into our 'aristocracy,' gave me an insight into the free unbiased condition of the American press. Sir Richard Dense, whom everyone calls 'Dickey D,' was very communicative with regard to ladies of the ballet and some popular actresses. What he used to tell me after half a dozen glasses of champagne at supper—well, perhaps you'd rather not hear!"

"I'd rather *you* had never heard," she said in alarm. "I thought you such a modest, reserved girl, Paula. How comes it that you've managed to draw so much out of your admirers?"

"That's my artfulness, I suppose. They all thought they were impressing me, while all the time they were disillusioning. I know the heart of man and his foibles and vanities a great deal better than he thinks I know it. Perhaps it is the—contrast—" I stopped, then hurried on. "They think I'm young and fresh and they give me 'tips,' so that I need not betray my ignorance of the social ropes."

"All this, I suppose, comes of being the niece of a

clever man," murmured Lady St. Quinton, ruefully. "They say his brother, your father, was even cleverer than the professor, and your mother would have been a second George Eliot had she lived."

"I am not sure I should have cared for her to be —*that*," I said. "You see I've read the Life and Letters."

Lady St. Quinton turned the conversation, and again paraded before me my admirers, my chances, and my astonishing indifference to both.

It was indifference—save so far as the extraction of facts on which to build my opinions, and form my theories.

I let thought wing me back to that brilliant episode—my first season. Rapid as a bird's flight seem those days of leisure and pleasure now I look back on them! I remember their incidents because Nature has gifted me with a brain that photographs and chronicles. I could take up any one of those incidents and what led to it, and what in turn led to the conclusions I have formed, were I so disposed; but the few facts I have jotted down tell enough.

When I began by asking myself if I were a fool, I asked it from the point of view of Lady St. Quinton; of that audacious firefly, the Lorely, whom I saw so often and hated so cordially; of—saddest of all—my friend, Lesley Heath!

For in different words and different ways they had all insinuated the same thing, "You had the ball at your feet and you've kicked it away; you'll never get another chance."

Lesley had picked up her ball. Its possession, however, did not seem to make her happy. Between us, of late, had crept a thin crust of reserve.

She had grown reticent of expressing her feelings, and I did not like to question her too closely.

I felt angered often when I thought of the happy, careless school days, the talks and confidences, the long letters we had exchanged even in brief absences.

The first chill had come with that visit to the Riviera. She had stayed with her step-mother at the villa of a certain Russian princess, had breathed an atmosphere of the most lavish and enervating extravagance, had met a crowd of men and women steeped to their finger-tips in worldly follies, and with one unceasing craze for excitement in some form.

It had been a bad school for a young girl, and Lesley's delicate beauty, and that sweet, small face of hers, had created a sensation among them all.

Hers was that strange combination—apparent helplessness and physical strength. The clear-tinted, clear-cut face made one think of ivory or porcelain, and the brown hair was so thick and ruffled that, to me, it always seemed to cast a shadow over the whiteness of the brow from which it waved.

That wave was ensnaring. Brush, or pin, or band the hair as you would, always it fell back into one soft ripple, and underneath its shadow of dusky brown the deep, full-lidded eyes looked out with something of a child's appeal, and a woman's fear of the unknown.

It seemed to me they always held the *fear* now.

But she would not speak of it, nor of why it had come, nor of that time when her letters ceased abruptly, and my promised description of the Riviera and the life of the gay little cities it owned was never fulfilled.

When she told me she was going to marry Lord Lynmouth I could not believe it. He was a weak-looking, dissipated man of forty, enormously wealthy, and with a reputation as enormously bad. Yet in cold, unmoved tones she announced she had accepted him, and was to be married at the beginning of October.

She was giving me one week of herself. One week of quiet days among my peaceful surroundings. It had been her own suggestion to come. And I scarcely believed she meant it.

But she is here, and she is sleeping now in the adjoining room while I write.

Lady St. Quinton wanted us to stay at the Court, but Lesley answered, "No. I want Paula to myself, and I am sure Paula wants me."

And I did want her. But I wanted my own Lesley, the girl I had known, the friend I had loved.

Should I ever find her again?

CHAPTER II.

TO-DAY I took Lesley to the castle, and showed her all my favorite spots.

We sat on the western slope, and I pointed to the cottage where Widow Vye lived, and described her powers of fortune-telling. Lesley was interested, and I repeated the prophecies which I remembered so well.

"That description of blue eyes rather applies to Lady Brancepeth," she said. "And, for some reason or other, Paula, she bears you no good will. How did you manage to offend her?"

I mentioned Captain Jim and the little incident of the screen. We discussed the incident with some diffidence, but it would be absurd to say that it held no significance for us now. A London season illuminates the meaning of many strange friendships.

"Have you ever heard from him since he went away?" asked Lesley.

"No, not a word. I liked him—rather. I hoped he would write. He was better than most of the men I have met. I mean he didn't only talk of sport, or scandal, or pay one foolish compliments."

"He drove you home against the Lorely's orders and sent you those things for your drawing-room! My dear, of course she'd hate you! He has been her special property so long that she'd never forgive the woman who made him forswear his allegiance."

"That sort of thing," I observed, "is very com-

mon in Society, isn't it? At first I thought it was only in Ouida's novels that one found the Lady Joan and Duchess de Sonnaz type of woman. But they do exist."

"Indeed they do. Books only describe what life produces. The life of the smart world is about as immoral as—well, as the two characters you have mentioned. Think of the extravagances, the waste of money, the thousand follies they commit. When I stayed at Princess Tchernigov's villa there were two women there who frankly acknowledged their dress allowance was supplemented by obliging friends—of the male persuasion. As for flowers and gloves and jewels—they were offered and accepted as a matter of course."

"Oh, Lesley," I said involuntarily, "and you are marrying into this set!"

She made no answer. Her eyes wandered off to the golden harvest fields that stretched to right and left.

"What has become of Adam Herivale?" she asked suddenly.

"I don't know. I suppose he is still at the farm. He will be busy now. It is harvest time."

"I should like to meet him."

"Why? He is not at all your style of man."

"But he is a man. At least your description showed him as one. It must be refreshing to meet one like him—simple, natural, true—without the vices of modern life, or the nauseating affection that is labeled culture. Bring him over while I am here, Paula."

I felt my cheeks grow hot. "I don't know if he will come," I said.

"Why—have you quarreled?"

"Not exactly. But before I left here—well, he——"

"Oh, Paula, fie! Another broken heart?"

"I hardly think his heart is broken. And really, Lesley, it was not my fault. I liked him very much in a friendly, appreciative fashion; but, oh—why will men always want you to *love* instead of like them? There's such a difference between the two, but they seem to think if you like to talk, or walk with, or are interested in them, you must of necessity fall into love as well. They spoil everything by such a ridiculous idea!"

"I suppose it is an idea that is the outcome of generations of slavish conquests. They think of us still as possible captives of bow and spear; the weapons only are different. Physical force has given place to mental, or magnetic, coercion. They would keep the attitude of 'conqueror' always if they could."

"Lesley, dearest," I said suddenly, "are you happy in the thought of this marriage? It seems to me——"

She stopped me by a pressure of her hand.

"Dear Paula, I never question the why and wherefore of my actions as you do. I want certain things of life and I take them while I have the chance. It will suit me very well to be queen of a social set that has only seen in me a girl's possibilities. This may sound very ignoble to you, but I have had a different education. As for love"—her voice grew hard—"it doesn't really last. It is very well while it does, but there are certain substantial benefits infinitely preferable. I am built on small lines—you on great ones. I have certain inherited tendencies that lead me to prefer luxury to insignificance. I can't help them. I only know they are as much a

part of myself as my hair or my hands. They will make up to me for many things. My husband-to-be may not seem a very desirable individual, but to me he is a very necessary one."

"You are only echoing Lady Archie. It's not your old true self speaking!"

Our eyes met—mine were hot and indignant. Hers—was it pain I read in them? Pain and rebellion suppressed by a strong hand, held down and conquered by force of will. I thought so, and the thought hurt me as nothing had hurt me yet.

"My old true self," she echoed, with a pause between each word. "I wonder where it is, Paula? Out of sight somewhere, or buried alive beneath an avalanche of worldly maxims? I confess I should not know where to look for it, or what to do with it if I found it."

"I don't believe it's lost," I said earnestly. "You are pretending to me as well as to your own heart, Lesley. In this quiet, simple life doesn't the old self come back and look at you with reproach? Nature never intended you to be the heartless coquette of fashion typified by such a woman as Lady Brancepeth."

Her face flushed suddenly. "Why did you bring up her name?"

"Because I think she is responsible for the change in you. An incentive to the race for a prize——"

"It certainly is a prize, my dear," she said mockingly. "Forty thousand a year, and two country seats, and a town mansion! I could not in justice to myself allow any one else to go off with them."

"But—if you are unhappy?"

"Paula," she said bitterly, "one is bound to be unhappy soon or late. It's a law of life from which

there's no escape. And as some modern writer cleverly puts it, it is better to be unhappy in comfortable surroundings than in uncomfortable ones. Cold that is warded off by satin eiderdowns and blazing fires is cold rendered luxurious. Who would prefer a tattered blanket, or an empty grate? I have been brought up to luxury. I have no fortune of my own. I have won the heart of a man who can give me everything I want, and I assure you, Paula, I want a great deal, because——"

She broke off, then rose abruptly. "Let us walk on," she said, her tone hard and strangely altered. "And for God's sake, Paula, don't lure me into sentimental confidences. They are useless. I have made up my mind."

I rose and followed her silently down the castle slopes. We walked past the old inn. A crowd of children were grouped round the Market Cross as if awaiting some event.

Suddenly in the distance sounded the merry blast of a horn. We glanced down the narrow street leading to the bridge, and saw a coach dashing up the hill. It rounded the corner and drew up in fine style before the great square porch of the Deerhound Inn. The red-coated guard descended nimbly, and the owner of the inn advanced with a smile of welcome and an eye to the patronage of hungry luncheon-seekers. The coach was crowded with people, and Lesley and I watched them descend and gaze about this Sleepy Hollow with some interest.

"Oh, that's the coach from Glenbourne, twenty miles away," I said. "It comes once a week in the season, but I've never been here at this time of year before. What a lot of people! I suppose they come to see the castle."

They were gazing about in that questioning, curious manner of tourists. Perhaps wondering, as I had done, that the vulgarity of modern life should desecrate so quaint a bit of ancient history as Scarffe.

For bicycles and cheap teas always seemed to me a desecration of the beautiful peace those circling hills had so long shut in from the inharmonious intrusion of the world without. But alas! the bicycle, and the excursion train, and the advertised "coaching trip" were doing what all modern civilization does—destroying the quaint and stately grace that still clings about historical landmarks!

I had not yet learned what this morning taught me—that peering eyes, and loud voices, and vulgar jests, and the competition of cheap wagonettes and hired "bikes" could turn Scarffe and its beautiful old ruin into a Hampstead Heath on bank holidays.

Lesley was watching the dispersing crowd with an interest I could not emulate. Suddenly an individual from among it approached us—a young, good-looking man with a field-glass swung over his shoulder, and a guide-book in his hand.

He lifted his hat. "May I ask you, ladies," he said, "if that's the way to the ruins?"

I felt inclined to answer, "May I ask you, man, if you've got eyes?" But his accent had given him away. I had learned something of that insatiable curiosity for information which has made the New World so important and domineering. I recognized an exponent of this curiosity, and answered it.

"That path," I said, "leads to a stone bridge. Before you is the gateway. You will note the massive towers twenty feet in diameter that have been blown to pieces by the Parliamentary gunpowder of 1646.

You will also pay sixpence for admission beyond that gateway. We don't give anything away in this country—even ruins."

"I guess you're giving away a fair lot of information," he said, smiling, and displaying a row of beautifully white and even teeth under a brown mustache. "I s'pose you live here and know all about it?"

"I—live here," I said, "but I know very little about it. I think we English don't concern ourselves about our surroundings, once we get used to them."

"Is that so?" he inquired, his face growing eager. "Well, now, it's often struck me that we Americans could give you points on your own history. As a nation you do seem ver-ry indifferent to it, if I may say so."

"I am afraid we are," I said. "We ought to be grateful for the introduction of Atlantic liners. They have at least helped us to some knowledge of our national possessions. Wasn't it an American traveler who first discovered Stonehenge?"

"I don't know about *that*," he said, with a keen look. "But I'm main sure that we taught you more about your Tower of London and your Shakespeare's village than you'd ever guessed."

Lesley looked at him and half smiled. "Yours is a young nation," she said, "and it has all youth's enthusiasm and buoyancy. This old land has had time to get tired of its history—even of itself."

"I guess that's so," he said. "Though we wouldn't object to some of the history, and a good deal of itself."

He glanced at me again, or rather at my hair, and up once more to the castle ruins.

"I s'pose," he said, "I'd best be getting along. There's a great deal to see up there, I'm told."

"Yes, and as you've thoughtfully provided yourself with a guide-book you'll be at no loss to find out the points of interest."

"I—I was thinking of spending a couple of days here," he went on. "Might I ask if that inn's the only sort of ho-tel in the place?"

"The only one. But it's very comfortable, and you can have the privilege of doing without gas, or elevators, or iced water, and sleeping in a room in which you can barely stand upright. I think the date is somewhere about 1733, if that's old enough to be of any value."

He glanced at the quaint stone porch, and then up to the old gray, moss-covered roofs around.

"It's about the most me-diæval place I've yet seen," he observed. "I guess I'll stay."

"You had better see about accommodation," I suggested. "A great many artists come here, and they always make the inn their headquarters."

"Thank you. I'll just go and deposit my 'grip.' I hope you'll excuse me for saying it's been a real pleasure to meet such a frank-spoken young English lady. Mostly they freeze up if you so much as ask them a question. We don't mean any harm by our questions. It's just our way to use our tongues. Your folk, I reckon, chain them up."

I laughed outright. He was so breezy and careless and good-humored that I felt perfectly assured he would not misinterpret my own frankness.

"I hope you'll enjoy your stay," I said. "Scarffe is a most interesting place, and so are its surroundings."

"Of that—I'm sure," he said, with an emphatic

glance again at my hair. "Good morning, and thank you for all your information. Would you—shake?"

He extended his hand. I gave him mine. But Lesley, with the faintest lifting of penciled eyebrows, only bowed and passed on.

"Do you always make friends in that free-and-easy manner?" she asked, as we walked homeward.

"Not always," I said. "But you must remember I am a student of life. What harm was there in exchanging those few words? I knew he was an American, and I think they are so interesting. And they are always polite to women."

"So their own women say," she answered. "It is because they are so used to exacting that they come over here to monopolize."

"They do take our best titles, there's no doubt of that," I observed.

"Well, I used rather to admire them until that Mrs. Washington E. Decker took to walking in the Park with a diamond-handled umbrella, and a long chain hanging from her neck containing a sort of transparent locket in which was a cigar-end that the Kaiser had once smoked. That cured my admiration."

I laughed softly. "I know. She called it her 'Relic.' But after all, Lesley, it isn't fair to judge a nation by its travelling samples. We English haven't an all-round reputation in that line."

"But we don't chip off stones whenever we come across an historical edifice, or gather up the refuse of royalty."

"But we *do* scribble our names over any available space, or cut them into the walls of history," I said.

"You'll find the British tourist has left 'John Smith, his mark,' even at Scarffe."

"You are more liberal-minded than I am, Paula."

"I don't know that. I have my prejudices, but the peculiarities of people make their characters. If you've read Dickens you must have found that every character he introduces is labeled with some eccentricity—I mean the principal characters. The Americans call them 'freaks,' not human beings."

"I suppose no American ever came across such characters."

"Have we?" I asked.

"They are types of a time with which we have had nothing to do."

"But types of human character must be true to human nature for *all* time—for any age."

"Well, and isn't Pecksniff the hypocrite of all time? Isn't Dombey the type of hard and pretentious pride, and old Dorrit of selfishness, and Peggotty of faithful love, and Dora of pretty silliness that is so attractive to very young men? One could go on repeating them *ad lib.*—but——"

The sound of hoofs at a rapid rate made us draw aside. A groom in the St. Quinton livery was coming along. He seemed to recognize me, drew rein, and touched his hat.

"Beg pardon, miss, I was taking a letter to you."

He handed it to me and I ran my eyes rapidly over it.

"Lady St. Quinton wants to know if we'd like the riding horses this afternoon," I said to Lesley. "Shall I say yes?"

Her eyes sparkled. "Oh, do! I'd love a ride above all things."

"She says, 'Tell the groom what time,' so I needn't write."

I turned to the man. "Tell her ladyship four o'clock, if she'll be so kind. It's cooler then."

He touched his hat again and rode off.

"Now you can show me Adam Herivale's farm," said Lesley.

"Very well; we'll ride past it and over that range of hills to the Beacon Cove. It's an adorable little place. We can rest the horses and have some tea. How kind of Lady St. Quinton to think of us!"

"I suppose there's no one at Court who rides," said Lesley.

"I think she has some people staying with her. You know she's asked us for Friday, and the professor has half promised to come also."

"He's an old dear," said Lesley, warmly. "It does one good to know that such a man *does* exist in this false, fantastic age."

"He *is* an old dear. There's no time to argue about the age, for here we are, and I expect luncheon is ready."

CHAPTER III.

I HAD not seen Adam Herivale since my return. We rode past Woodcote, its fruitful fields now ripening for harvest. The house itself was bowered in honeysuckle and clematis and jessamine. I glanced somewhat anxiously about as our horses trotted past, and we had scarcely left it behind when I caught sight of a figure on the road before us. I knew it at a glance. His horse was going at a walking pace, and as we neared the rider looked round, then drew aside as if to let us pass.

But I was determined to speak.

"How are you, Adam? You see I have come back."

He lifted his cap. "I am quite well, thank you, Miss Trent." (No "Paula" now.) "I hope you are?"

"Oh, yes. London didn't kill me, you see. I feel much the same as when I went away."

Then I introduced Lesley, and asked after his mother.

"We are going to the Beacon Cove," I added. "How far is it to ride?"

"It's a very long way," he answered. "Too long for two young ladies to go alone, I should say. You'll have to rest the horses, and you won't be back till eight or nine o'clock to-night."

"I can't help that. We've made up our minds to go. Miss Heath is only to be a week with me, and every day is mapped out."

He looked at her with that wondering admiration I had seen in so many men's eyes. That lovely little white face, with its deep eyes, had an irresistible attraction.

"If I should not be intruding," he said diffidently, "I could show you a much shorter way of getting to the cove. That coach-road is very tedious. It winds about so."

"Oh, *will* you?" I cried delightedly.

And that settled it.

We rode abreast when the road allowed of it, and I gave shy glances at the face I had not seen for so long. I had plenty others in my memory with which to contrast it. Handsomer, more refined, more intellectual, but in none of them had I seen that strength and calmness so characteristic of Adam's. That wholesome, candid, fearless honesty which was as the imprint of a clean and fearless soul.

He talked more to Lesley than to me, but I had no objection to that. I seemed, indeed, to acquire a new knowledge of him while playing the part of listener. How was it he talked so well, and had so cultured a knowledge? He must have read and studied a great deal since we had parted, or else Lesley had a happy knack of drawing him out, and making him reveal undiscovered corners of his mind that I had passed by.

It was, as he had said, a very long way to the cove, and but for his skilful piloting would have been longer.

I found myself wondering how it was that frank and easy comradeship was so possible with this man, and that the pruderies and pretences of sex demanded by social intercourse in the fashionable

world were here quite superfluous. Adam Herivale would not, and I felt sure *could* not, bring a blush to a girl's cheek, or misinterpret her friendly advances. He was courteous, cool, polite, sometimes forgetting and adopting the homely phraseology of his country habits. But all the time I was conscious of a change in him. A change that set us apart. A rift in the lute of friendly intimacy that had played such pleasant music once. He asked no questions as to my doings in London, but I noticed he listened eagerly to any chance word of Lesley's that threw light upon them.

When we arrived at the cove we went to the one little hotel of which the place boasted. There we all had tea in a large bow-windowed room looking out on the sea.

Lesley was enchanted with the place. It consisted of a single street of picturesque thatched cottages, bowered in greenery and roses. The street led down an incline to a sort of basin which formed the cove. Beyond this inlet lay the wide, open waters of the Channel, blue as indigo under the warm and cloudless sky. The cove itself was shut in completely on two sides by high, chalky cliffs, and at the little landing-place were dozens of fishing boats, their owners lounging on the rough, pebbly strand in that attitude of alert idleness peculiar to fisher folk.

We refused invitations for a sail or row, and went up the steep ascent to the flagstaff, and sat down on the grass to rest and take in the charm of our surroundings.

"I'm not surprised that artists come here," said Lesley. "I feel tempted to bring a pencil-and-paper memory away with me."

"Can't you take a mental photograph?" I suggested.

"There is too much of it, and it's all so beautiful one doesn't like to miss anything out."

I felt I wasn't leaving "anything out," and relapsed into silence.

Here, as at Scarffe, we were shut in from bleak surroundings by a circle of hills, their brown level varied by patches of green, where sheep cropped and strayed. Before us, as we rested now, was a jagged line of rocks broken off from the mainland, and full of hollows, into which the sea poured and foamed. Through natural arches one looked at the wide-spreading water beyond, calm now in the mellow evening light. About us was an undisturbed peace. Sky and sea held that deep blue that rests the eye almost as its kindred color green can do—the two hues of Nature of which one never wearies.

White sails flashed in the far distance. A steamer's smoke trailed like a blurred shadow across the horizon; the sweet salt air blew softly up and left its cool touch on our faces. No wonder artists loved this nook of shallow waters, and brown rock, and silvery sand, and changeful sunsets; and had immortalized those quaint cottages bowered in fuchsia and honeysuckle and cabbage roses.

I was so lost in thought and in imagining a life set amidst these surroundings that I paid no attention to my companions. I heard them talking, but their words passed me by, even as the breeze did, that touched my hair in its passage from the sea to the waiting hills above.

I was roused by an eager exclamation.

"Well, now," it said, "if this isn't luck! I thought I recognized your hair. I've never seen any like it."

I looked up, startled, into the joyous face of my American acquaintance of the morning.

"How on earth did you get here?" I gasped.

"Guess I just hired a horse from the manager of that ho-tel. He told me this was one of the places that *had* to be seen, so I just *had* to see it."

I laughed with genuine amusement. "Well, you are energetic," I said. "Did you get through the ruins before lunch, and then ride on to the cove?"

"I did. They were *ver-ry* fine and *ver-ry* interesting, but they didn't take more than a couple of hours to get through. And when I'd got through, I didn't want to waste time, so I asked the landlord what next, and he advised—this. But only fancy seeing *you*! Well——"

He looked so ecstatic that I concluded my hair had won for me my usual fate.

"I rode over, too," I said, "and had tea. We're going back directly."

"Oh, I don't want any tea," he answered. "It gives me dyspepsia. You people over here drink a great deal too much of it. Wonder you're not all nerves. Look here, hadn't we better exchange names. I've left my cards behind at the boarding-house, but my name's Quain—Dr. Mark Christopher Quain—of New York City."

"Oh," I said, "I'm very pleased to meet you, Dr. Quain. I met several of your countrymen and—women—in London this season, but you're the first doctor I've come across. Is this your first visit to England?"

"No," he said, "my third. I've always taken a trip across when I could spare a holiday. It's *ver-ry* interesting, is Eu-rope; *ver-ry* interesting."

"It is considered so," I answered. "I've never

been out of England myself. But of course one reads so much that one almost gets to know foreign places."

I was a little distance from Lesley, to whom he had bowed, but now, in answer to a certain discomposed look in Adam Herivale's face, I introduced my new acquaintance cursorily as Dr. Quain from New York.

Lesley's eyes flashed surprise, but she soon turned and resumed her conversation with Adam.

I went on with mine, delighted at the breezy manner and apparently unlimited acquaintance with everything, characteristic of my new friend.

"What a number of places you've seen!" I exclaimed, as he ran over a list. "And how you seem to have enjoyed them!"

"So I have," he said. "I've just had a fascinating time."

"Isn't this a lovely little spot?" I asked. "It's the first time I've ever seen it."

"You don't say?—and living so close!"

"But I haven't lived at Scarffe; only spent a yearly holiday here, and generally at Christmas."

"But you're not at school now, surely?"

"Oh, no! I'm out, as girls call it."

"And you're going to live hereabouts? You won't find it very—exciting."

"I can't tell until I've tried it. As yet it's been only interesting. I was here all the winter, then went up to London in April, and came back two days ago."

"Parents living?"

"No. I live with an uncle, who is my guardian. He is very celebrated. Perhaps you've heard of him—Professor Trent?"

"You don't say?—your uncle? I should just think I *had* heard of him. I've got his book on the famous ruins of England in my trunk. Told me more about Stonehenge and Salisbury than I'd ever known. And your uncle—well, I'm ver-ry pleased to know you. Shake."

He extended his hand and I gave him mine.

"Is that an American custom?" I asked.

"Well, when one gets worked up to enthusiasm, it is."

"Oh, then I know what to expect. May I ask why you look at my hair like that?"

"It's so wonderful. I've never seen that sort of color but once before in my life. Might be matched from yours."

"Indeed, and who was the—unfortunate possessor?"

"Come now, Miss Trent, you know better'n that. It's really bu—tiful; like living sunshine let loose."

"More like sunset, I think. It's a source of trouble to me. Perhaps as you're a doctor you can explain the chemical reasons for such a remarkable color."

"Well, I'm not exactly a medical doctor," he explained. "Dentistry's my line. I'm over here now to join a branch established on our American system."

The word gave me a little shock. "Dentistry!" I exclaimed. "Then why do you call yourself a doctor?"

"Because I guess I am a doctor of dental surgery. I've taken all my degrees, though I'm only twenty-six."

"Oh!" I said indifferently, wondering why Americans always explained so much. "But over here we

don't call dentists *doctors*. I thought you were a medical man."

"Well, in one sort of way I am. I guess my science is as important as curing fevers, or dosing folks with drugs. I've noticed you people over here have a sort of prejudice against the name 'dentist.' Seems queer. Why, we study and go to college and take degrees same as the medicos. We have brought our profession to as near *per*-fection as it can be brought. But somehow to English minds a dental surgeon is only a tooth-extractor. Over our way it's different. We're as good as the medical profession every bit, and have every right to call ourselves doctors."

I felt somewhat embarrassed. It was a first experience, and I had the usual schoolgirl's idea that a dentist *was* only a "tooth-extractor," as he had said. I changed the subject by asking if he were going to settle in London.

"I must—for three years," he said. "I was sent over to one of our recent establishments and I'm bound to stay. I'm taking a holiday first. You see I've been frank and told you exactly who I am so there'd be no mistake. You were so friendly I shouldn't like to seem as if I'd taken advantage of it."

"Thank you for your frankness and explanation. As you say, there does exist a prejudice—an odd one, I suppose. But don't let that trouble us at present. Tell me about America. It's a country that interests me greatly. It's so tremendously enterprising, and rich, and extravagant."

I thought of the Kaiser's cigar story, but concluded to keep it to myself.

He waxed enthusiastic over the glories of his

land, and I heard of the vast extent covered by the wings of that celebrated Bird of Freedom—of marvelous cities, of marvelous inventions and still more marvelous riches.

There I checked him. "I never can believe," I said, "that enormous fortunes can be made honestly. Some one has to suffer, something has to be sacrificed. Truth, or honor, or human lives. I have read in your own books that gold is the god of your nation; that you talk dollars, dream dollars, live and die for dollars. Is that so?"

"We *are* rather given that way," he allowed. "But I guess we're not so different from the rest of the world."

"Perhaps not," I said. "The craze for wealth seems pretty universal. But the craze for advertising one's millions is certainly an American prerogative. We may be as avaricious; we are certainly less boastful. If you can't go 'one better' than your brother millionaire, you do your best to try."

"I'm afraid that's true. There's a rivalry in dollars as in other things—say——"

"The height of skyscrapers?" I suggested.

"I won't deny that, because I've recognized our faults in the light of other folks' opinions since I've traveled about. But you must be very well read, or very interested in such matters, to know so much about them."

"When I was in London I had the privilege of meeting one of your writers. He had been a leading journalist for many years on a Boston paper. We used to have long talks. Do you know what he said to me once? I had told him that a gentleman just returned from the States had said the *quantity* of journals published in America was per-

fectly appalling. 'Not so appalling as the quality,' he answered."

"Well, Miss Trent, I won't discuss our literature or our faults. You're too young to worry your head about racial differences, and I'm not a bigoted patriot. Seems a pity to get on any rock of obstruction instead of keeping friendly. Perhaps you'll allow me to join your party on the ride back. I did get a room at that inn, and I'm going to stay over to-morrow."

I saw Lesley had risen, so I followed her example, and we rode back to Scarffe two and two.

My companion was Dr. Mark Christopher Quain.

CHAPTER IV.

THE steed borrowed from the landlord of the Deerhound was not up to the standard of the Quinton Court stables, and I had to keep pace, or leave my companion behind.

"I'm spoiling your ride," he said.

"Well, you can talk as we go along. There's no fear of our getting lost even if we're out till moon-rise. By-the-by, you said you had once seen someone with hair that matched mine. Who was it, and where?"

"As for *where*—it was in America I saw her. She was, and is, an actress. A ver-ry beautiful woman, and renowned for her wonderful hair. She acted in a piece where it all has to tumble down, and she just drew the whole town to see her in that act. I went myself every night for a week. It was like a cataract of golden rain. Sort of thing you see when a rocket goes off. So light, so bright, fairly dazzled you. And she *could* act—no doubt about that."

My interest quickened. "What was her name?"

"Desallion—Mrs. Desallion."

"Oh, not an American, or she'd have the initials of half the alphabet."

He laughed. "I see you know us—some. No, she wasn't American. No one could quite say what nation, and she'd never tell. She used to rile the interviewers. Laugh in their faces and tell them to guess. And each one gave her a different birth-

right. They were mad when the papers came out. Oh, there's no mistake she's clever!"

"And acts well?"

"Oh, fine! Thrills you through and through. Makes you in love with wickedness, for it's always wicked women she plays. Men go wild about her. But she's not one to waste her fervors or her favors. 'Cute all through and an eye to the main chance—that's Nina Desallion."

He pronounced the name softly as if it held two s's. I murmured it over half aloud for the pure pleasure of hearing it, I thought it so charming.

"Done some queer things, though," he went on, warming to my interest. "Cut the stage once and joined the Salvation Army, and took to going about with a tambourine, for all the world like the girl in 'The Belle of New York.' Of course that set the men crazy. They sort of clung to religion for a spell; said 'twas an ultimate refuge. But it didn't last long. None of her crazes do. She went back to the stage in six months. She says she tires of a man in one. So that religion was five degrees better."

"That sounds rather—shocking," I said, and yet even as I said it I thought of my own capacity for change, and my own inability to discover in any man I had met sufficient to interest me for even a week. With a new subject for experiment I began to touch that delicate ground.

"Do you think," I said, "that a woman should be blamed because she can't find a man capable of holding her love, as well as winning it? That seems to me the problem of life. You men all think that your duty ends with the winning. From my point of view I should say it only began."

(It wasn't my point of view. It was Fenella's. But I had imbibed so much of Fenella's philosophy that I had begun to make it my own.)

He looked at me with the awakening interest I had learned to arouse in a man's face. The interest that tells a girl she has suddenly presented herself in a light different from that of other girls.

"Only *begun*," he repeated. "Do you mean when a man has loved and served and waited, and at last won the woman he loves, that he still *hasn't* won her?"

"He has won her heart truly only when he satisfies it completely. But if it isn't satisfied it will stray, as surely as a bird will fly through the opened door of its cage. Love alone makes a lasting bond between two human hearts. Show me a man with the record of a woman's life-long love, and I will confess him a greater hero than our bestarred and titled conquerors."

"There's stories in history. There's your own Shakespeare's great tragedy——"

"I said *life-long*. Those people scarcely tasted love before life was ended. That is no proper test."

"But—well, you see, Miss Trent, you're so very young to discuss such a point!"

"Don't American girls discuss every point at issue with so momentous a thing as marriage?—every social law and obligation? Does a woman owe so little to the fact of *being* a woman that she can ignore the responsibilities of her sex, or the critical exactions of her nature? A man promises her love measureless, eternal. She believes him capable of rendering it, but he isn't. She looks for the infinite and finds a limit. From what source can content spring?"

(Paula felt very proud of herself at that moment. It was not often that thought flowed so readily into the channels of speech. Not often that a listener presented himself at convenient moments.)

"I don't know how you've come to know so much about love and marriage, and the duties of man to woman. In America, of course, our girls are brought up with wide views on all subjects, and can talk on most any of them. But it's not often an English girl will do it."

"No," I said, "an English girl thinks that an impersonal discussion on love with a man under seventy is indelicate, and a personal discussion with a man over twenty would mean a declaration. Her tongue is tied, you see."

(Oh, Paula! enjoying your experiment and wearing the garb of original philosophy, and all the time a base echo.)

It did me good to hear him laugh.

"Permit me," he said; "as I'm under seventy and over twenty—will you discuss love with me—impersonally?"

"Certainly. It is an opportunity I have always desired."

"Is that so?"

His eye flashed keen interrogation. I answered back with becoming gravity, my finger on a smile that longed to break bounds. His own composure gave way first.

"I guess it's an experience," he said. "But, as I said before, you're ver-ry interesting. I said that to myself when I left you this morning and went over that gangway you told me about. Seemed as if you weren't a stranger at all—but a friend I'd

met and mislaid, and found again. They say destiny changes hands with a hand-clasp."

"Yes; and we did—shake," I said demurely. "But please remember this is to be a discussion without personalities. We'll have a gallop first and then breathe the horses. You can't trot to an argument."

I started off, more to prepare myself by a rapid summary of points than to excuse a gallop. However, I drew up at the brow of the hill and waited for him to open a gate which led to one of Adam Herivale's "short cuts."

We walked the horses through a narrow lane fragrant with hedge-row treasures, and green with the shade of larch and beech, and we talked—whether wisely or foolishly I don't know—of what love is, and was, and might, and could, and should be.

After this elaborate conjugation we seemed very much where we had been when we started, save that the discussion had made us feel quite old friends, and he wanted me to call him "Mark."

I told him it was too soon. Then he explained a legend which stated that in the embryonic period of the world men and women were one—a unity, not a division. That at a later period of time they separated and became two distinct beings. Now, at rare intervals, some fragments of their earlier selves met and knew each other, and were drawn back into an overwhelming desire for that old lost union. This explained sudden love, sudden friendship; the assurance of a quickly awakened sympathy. It also, so it seemed, explained why we should be "Mark and Paula" in his opinion.

I failed, however, to discover in myself any hint

of that past intercommunion, or any desire for its renewal.

So I took another gallop, and my kindred soul had to follow, and landed breathlessly behind me as we came in sight of Adam Herivale's farm.

Here I found the others resting the horses, and drew rein beside them.

"Where is your friend?" asked Lesley.

"Plodding on behind," I answered. "Mr. Herivale, there's no need to trouble you for further escort. Miss Heath and I will leave the horses at the Court lodge and walk home across the fields."

"You'll be too tired," he said. "Hadn't you better let one of my men take them back, and I'll drive you home."

I looked at Lesley and then across the darkening valley. "Very well," I said, "as it is so late that would be a better plan. May I run in and have a chat with your mother for a few moments?"

"I'm sure she would be very pleased," he answered. "She was saying to-day you hadn't been to see her since your return from town."

He helped us dismount, and summoned one of the farm hands.

Just then Dr. Quain approached. I told him of our change of plans and saw his look of disappointment. But I had been cautioning myself against that unwise proceeding known as "making oneself too cheap." He had been just as useful, as entertaining and as interesting as I wanted him to be. It seemed a pity to add five minutes' boredom to that sense of entertainment.

He ambled off to Scarffe, and Lesley and I sat on in the sweet old fragrant parlor, talking to Mrs.

Herivale and watching the moon rise over the circling hill.

"How restful it is!" I said—after we had discussed my visit to London and my dip into the waters of Society; after she had surveyed me with that calm, wise regard that seemed to me always the garnered essence of motherhood, and pronounced me "very little changed."

"Yes," she agreed. "And there's no better thing than rest when it comes to the ending of days. Some run quickly through life, and with others 'tis a slow parting. I think it's meant that the tarrying hours should be an education of the tarrying soul."

There was a pathos in her voice and in her quiet face that touched me with fear.

"You are not feeling worse than when I went away?" I asked.

"Much better, my dear, much better," she said. "I've had many years given to me to learn content; and when one has known months of pain you get grateful for a day that's free of suffering. I've had many days—of late."

"That's a good sign, surely," I said.

She smiled. "Good or bad, my dear, it makes but little difference to the end that comes to all. Queen and beggar, sovereign and subject, rich and poor. 'Tis a wonderful mystery, and we only seem to see the wonder of it as the day of life begins to close—even as we only see the beauty of night when the sun has set."

* * * * *

"That was a beautiful thought," said Lesley, later on, as we were driving home.

She had been silent so long that Adam and I both

looked at her, as if for a clew to that expressed thought.

"What one?" I asked.

"About only seeing the beauty of night when the sun has set. Is your mother a great sufferer, Mr. Herivale?"

"She never complains," he said. "Her patience is so great that it's always been hard to get her to even confess she's ailing. This hot summer seems to have weakened her, though. She's less active and quieter by far."

"You must be very fond of her?"

"I am," he said; "I don't know who could help it. And as for father—she's just the heart of him, so to say. I dread to think of what the parting hour will mean to him. I think she dreads it, too."

"But there's a long time, let us hope, before that parting hour."

"We do hope it," he answered gravely. "But the doctor seemed anxious about her the last time he called. She's weaker, and doesn't seem to care about things in the same way."

"I wonder why life is so cruel," cried Lesley, suddenly. "If we are happy, or content, or have just gained something that we desire and value, straightway it all ends! Sickness, death, division, loss—oh! how one wonders why one is born at all!"

"Ah, Miss Heath," said Adam, gravely, "it's early days for youth and beauty such as yours to utter words so despairing! I think there's too much nowadays of expecting all the good of life, and not enough thankfulness at escaping the evil. For you, and for Miss Paula there, no great sorrow or suffering can be more than a name—as yet. You see others suffering, and your own joyfulness resents it.

'Tis like a blot on the page you're reading, but it needn't set you blaming life—or rather what created life. You have to learn a great deal more, and perhaps suffer too, before you realize it as worthless."

Paula, the impetuous, put in her oar then.

"One must generalize sometimes, Adam. It is quite impossible to look on at life with indifference. Sorrow and loss are everywhere, and their shadow hovers over every tie of love and nature. God puts us into life, as you say, but we have to grope hopelessly about trying to find out its meaning. Our very religious faith is a mere accident of birth. We are Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists, Puritans or Atheists, according to our early training. If we obey the commandment of obedience to parents we must believe as *they* believe, and worship as they worship. All sects are authoritative as to *that* special duty. But who is to decide which of them all is the right?"

"I hardly suppose sects are important to the Almighty Himself; and though, as you say, Miss Trent, He puts us on the stage of life, He has given us free will as a conscious inheritance. We know wrong from right. It's not easy to explain—but there's a direction given us—an inner spring that moves our lives. We need only come out face to face with Nature, and lie passive till the message reaches us. It'll come safe enough if we don't close our ears or choke our hearts with the dust and dross of earthly vanities."

"You are a pagan, Adam," I said, laughing. "But, I'm not sure that Nature is altogether a safe teacher. She has cruelties as well as mercies, blows as well as kisses. Her face is as changeful as a woman's mind, and her temper as uncertain."

"Miss Paula, you always bettered me at an argument, and I've never found it easy to speak of things that I feel very much. I'm quite sure you understand what I mean, but you won't pretend to."

In the clear, soft light I met his eyes. I saw their sorrow and their pain, and my heart grew weak, and I felt ashamed.

I recognized in that moment some height to which I could not reach. All about me grew dim and dream-like; and I held my peace, as did he.

But he had made me remember as he remembered.

CHAPTER V.

I WAS standing by the window looking out at a star-lit world, dew-pearled and luminous, and full of a beauty that made my heart ache.

Why it should ache I cannot say, but it did; and odds and ends of poetry floated to my mind, and I was as sentimental, as romantic, as passionately desirous of some vague happiness necessary to complete this beauty as any heroine of fiction. I seemed to be a part of a dream. This stillness that yet was not silence, since *absolute* silence has no existence, this weird charm of moonlight and shadow, perfume and peace, breathed a spell I had never known before. All was so vague, so beautiful, so unreal; and most unreal of all was Paula herself, trembling with some sense of spiritual awakening; hardly conscious of her thoughts or desires, but overpowered by a sudden sense of longing to *understand*.

There might have been a prayer in her soul then, a vague appeal to the Great Mystery that the heavens seem to hold—to something in those sparkling worlds above that no science can explain with any satisfaction to the inquirer.

It had never explained them to me. Only set me wondering as to what millions of imprisoned souls might not be there, pitying this dark, tiny planet which man deems so all-important.

Fancy applying the nursery book of school as-

tronomy to such a heaven as that I gazed upon, to such a moon as bathed the castle ruins in its lustrous glow!

A touch on my arm startled me almost into a scream. I turned and saw Lesley.

"I knocked and you never answered, so I came in. How many hundreds of miles away were you, Paula? You look hardly awake yet."

"It is such a wonderful night," I said. "I couldn't undress or go to bed. There's nothing affects me so keenly as moonlight. I sometimes think a great happiness or a great sorrow will come to me on a night like this."

She made no answer; only leaned out as I was leaning, and looked as I was looking.

I slipped my hand into her arm and rested my head against her. When she began to speak her voice was so low, and blended so harmoniously with the tender peace around, that I felt myself listening with a new sense of pleasure to its always musical accents.

"It has been a day of surprises," she said. "Almost too many impressions are crowded into it; but of them all, Paula, there is one that stands out more distinctly than all the rest. It is the deep, strong love that Adam Herivale has for *you*. You don't answer?—You know it?"

"Yes," I said, "I know—not its depth or its strength, there has been nothing to prove them—yet. But I know he—cares."

"That is a poor word to express it," she said. "His life is bound up in it."

"How can you tell? Surely he——"

"Now, Paula, don't do him that injustice. He said nothing. But how he suffered! Every hour of

this afternoon and evening was pain to him. You asked how I know——”

The arm on which my hand rested shook slightly.

“I have learned,” she said, “by my own experience.”

“Lesley!” I cried.

Her face was like a bit of carved ivory in its death-like whiteness.

“I never meant to tell you, Paula. It would be better that I should not. I never might have felt a temptation to do it, but for Adam Herivale.”

I was silent, but my thoughts took a backward flight, and I saw three schoolgirls in a little bedroom discussing the possibilities of life, and what it might mean for each of them.

“Lesley,” I said, “you have learned—it has come to you?”

“Yes,” she said. “It has come—and gone.”

I turned to look at her. That little white, flower-like face, those deep, deep eyes were suddenly transformed for me. They represented the mystery of womanhood. Its hunger, its passion, its pain.

“Turn out that light,” she said suddenly, “and then we will sit here by the window where only the stars can see us, and I will try to tell you.”

I put out the lamp, and silently came back and took the little hand she held out to me—as a child appeals for protection.

(Even then that hateful sense of the dramatic import of the scene flashed to my brain with a hundred meanings apart from her own.)

“I have told no one,” she began. “I have borne it and hidden it till I cannot bear it any longer. Paula, you remember when I wrote that I was to

spend a month at the villa of the Princess Nadia Tchernigov?"

"Yes——"

"Among the guests," she said, "was a man—a Russian count whom all the women raved about. It was not only that he was handsome, well-born, rich, but he had a charm indescribable. To be noticed by him was a hall-mark of distinction. I was only a foolish schoolgirl, as you know, Paula, and I was thrown among this set of fast, society women—some of them lovely, most of them reckless, with no one to give me a word of counsel or warning. When Count Zavadoff singled me out for attention I became the subject of bitter jealousy and openly displayed envy. But he did single me out, and his attention and homage drew first my fancy, then my wonder, then my heart. Beside him I was but an ignorant girl. He was so cultured and so gifted. There seemed nothing he could not do—soldier, *littérateur*, artist, man of the world—could any girl resist the fascinations of such a man?"

"And you loved him, Lesley? You know what it is to—love?" I whispered breathlessly.

"I loved him—yes. I love him to this hour. I shall love him to my last hour on earth. It is better and simpler to speak out the truth and have done with it, Paula. And now that I have begun to speak it seems easier. He told me of his own feelings, of my own danger——"

"Danger!" I echoed.

"Yes. He was not free, Paula. He had a wife—a helpless, half-imbecile creature whom fate had cursed within two years of their marriage. She lived apart at one of his great estates. As far as

any obligations of the tie were concerned he was free—but he could not marry!”

“And he made you love him, and then told you *this!*” I cried indignantly.

“I think sometimes he did not know I loved him. He thought it was a girl’s fancy and might be easily cured. He took that way of curing it.”

“It was horribly cruel!”

“It was a great shock,” she said. “But those women were as much to blame, for *they* knew, and left me to drift on to my doom.”

“But didn’t Lady Archie say anything?”

“She never seemed to notice—and I believe she also thought I knew he wasn’t free. And it all came about so strangely.”

I saw her close her eyes, and suddenly she put her hands up to her face as if to hide it.

“I never think of it, Paula, but I see a dazzling sky and a dazzling sea, so bright they seem to beat into my brain. I never want to see that coast again unless I have learned to forget. And now you know why I have accepted Lord Lynmouth!”

“Oh, Lesley!”

“It may sound wrong to you, Paula, but I know what I am doing. I want a defence; marriage is the best. If we ever meet again I—am safe.”

“Are you safe? If I am to judge by the stories I have heard, the scenes I have witnessed, marriage is not always a safeguard to other passions. It neither prevents nor forbids them.”

“I shall not be a woman like Lady Brancepeth. My very experience is my safeguard. There is no coldness like that of a heart that has known love—and foregone it.”

“Oh, my dear, my dear—and but a few months

ago you were so happy, and all life seemed a jest!"

"It is never a jest, Paula. We should not pretend it or believe it. Childhood has its sorrows, and youth and maturity theirs. When I think of those days, and then of one that changed everything for me, I seem to have left that self I knew behind. There ought to be a pale ghost sitting on a rock of that seaboard below Eza—a ghost looking out at a blue haze that dazzles and glitters, and then fades into a blackness no earthly night can bring. The ghost of myself, Paula—something from which I walked away, saying 'Good-by—good-by—I have left you forever; I shall never meet you again.'"

"And it was—this—that changed you—not the season, as I fancied?"

"Yes—it was this."

"And did it end like that? You never met him again?"

"No; he went away. That was the end for both of us."

"Are you not afraid you may meet him again?"

"Yes," she said. "Horribly afraid. That is why I am taking refuge in this matrimonial ark. Oh, Paula! Paula! the looks, the jeers, the hints of those women, and my heart a living torture, my pride so shamed! I don't know how I lived through it——"

She shivered as with sudden cold, and her hands fell.

"If it would end—if I could kill out the feeling! Sometimes I seem to forget—and it is quite gone, and I can smile and talk and dance, and then like a knife-thrust it is back—the pain and humiliation, the

passion and bitterness and despair. In a single day, a single hour, Paula, love teaches us what neither books nor any other experience can teach. We live or die, I think, in that birth-struggle of the heart."

"It sounds so pathetic," I said.

"It sounds—what it is. Don't wish for the experience, Paula. Be thankful if you can evade it. I have told you the truth, partly for my own ease, partly to warn you. If you choose to hold out a hand you may claim a love and a lover worthy the name; worth all that rank and riches can bestow. But I know you won't hold it out. Perhaps you don't care."

"I care so much," I said, "that I am sorry I cannot care more. Do you understand such a feeling?"

"No," she said, "I do not, Paula. But we are of different temperaments. Love comes to no two natures in exactly the same way. You are so vivid, so full of force and energy, so eager to *know*. I—it would have been quite enough had he loved me."

"But he did; you said so."

"I think he experimented with me for his own purpose. He must have known what it would be, but I could not. When he spoke of his sufferings——"

For the first time her voice broke. At my quick glance the tears gathered and began to fall. I drew her into my arms with a new passion of tenderness and something of wrath against the cruelty that had left such cruel hurt behind.

"Why do you cry for him?" I said. "I don't believe men suffer."

"Yes, Paula, they do. Don't run away with that theory."

She controlled herself by an effort.

"He did suffer. It was a surprise to himself. He thought I would have let it all go on—played with fire as—as so many others had done. And I would *not*. I would not go back. I was inexorable. I sent him from me, and now it is all over. For when I marry——"

She rose abruptly and wrung her hands in a desperate, helpless way. "If *that* does not save me nothing will," she said. "If life isn't full to the brim its emptiness terrifies me. I must throw myself into something—politics, charities, philanthropy—something that will take up my days and hold my thoughts. To live as I live is impossible, and Lynmouth will not be an exacting or troublesome husband. I must go on with it, Paula—I must."

"It won't be easy," I said.

"I know. Don't suppose I haven't looked at it every way. It's no use being sentimental. I marry knowing *why* I marry, and what I am marrying for. It's less of a degradation than it might be. I make no pretence of feelings. And he doesn't ask it. I like him well enough to make him a good wife. Everyone at home wishes it. It will be of inestimable advantage to my father and—that nursery cherub. Besides, Lynmouth has honored me by an assurance that he knows I'm 'the sort of girl that will run straight and not kick over the traces.' All the self-indulgence I shall allow myself is my friendship for you, Paula, and an avoidance of the Riviera. . Not much — and yet a great deal. We were never demonstrative—you and I—but I cannot allow our lives to drift apart."

"I hope they never will," I said. I rose also, and with clasped hands we stood by the open window, the moonlight on our faces, and disquiet in our hearts.

"How soon things changed," I said involuntarily. "We are the same Paula and the same Lesley who wanted to know the truth and the purpose of Life—and now——"

"My fruit of knowledge," she said, "is bitter, and hateful, and poisonous. Yours?"——

"I have not plucked it yet," I said. "I am only looking at the boughs."

CHAPTER VI.

I SLEPT badly that night, haunted by the pale misery of Lesley's face.

Besides, I should not have been Paula had I not relived that story, and pictured that Russian count, and seen a Byronic hero, passionate and unprincipled, breaking hearts without compunction till suddenly Fate had turned on him and left him suffering and alone. It seemed strange that such a romance should have come to her, and passed me by. I—who wanted to play heroine to my own life-story, and only succeeded in finding unsuitable backgrounds. What was the use of Adam Herivale loving me? I cared for him a little, but Lesley had given me an insight into love the passion, and I felt that nothing less would satisfy my heart.

"One draught of the true wine of life," had said my oracle, "is worth a thousand sips of inferior brands. Better go thirsty forever after, than be content with a poorer vintage."

"The true wine of life." Would it ever be offered to me?

"All the best love stories are unhappy ones," I thought. "It seems as if Fate meant them for a tragic ending! I have a horror of suffering. I feel I should want to run away from anything that threatened discomfort or pain. Oh, to think that Lesley has learned the great secret first, and I never suspected it!"

I tossed from side to side. I turned my pillow, and tried to shut my eyes to that radiant moonlight, but for long sleep refused to come to me.

I had made the acquaintance of a new Lesley and was bound to follow it through many mazes of conjecture. Yet the picture was evasive and incomplete, and I felt an ever-growing dissatisfaction with it. But strangest of all was the thought that she had learnt to suffer and yet conceal the fact of suffering. Even I, who knew her so well, had never suspected it. Now her forthcoming marriage stood out in a totally new light. It struck a note of tragedy, and on the bridal white a shadow seemed to rest.

"I wonder why she persists in going through with it," I said to myself. "How can she expect to be anything but miserable? To sacrifice *herself* for sake of a memory!"

The strangeness and the folly of it angered me; though when Lesley had spoken, I felt only pity.

* * * * *

I slept at last and woke to a dull morning with a sky that threatened rain. My head ached, and a sense of depression weighed on my spirits. The memory of Lesley's confession came back afresh and left me half anxious and half eager to meet her.

Merrieless brought me a message from her. She also had a headache; would I excuse her from coming down to breakfast?

I dressed and went to her. The blinds were drawn, but even in the dim light I saw how pale and tired she looked.

"We sat up too late," I said, as I kissed her. Her forehead was burning, and her eyes spoke pain. I

made a cool lotion and steeped a handkerchief in it and laid it on her head. "Don't speak," I said. "Just lie quietly there till the pain goes. I will see you are not disturbed."

She pressed my hand.

"You always understand, Paula," she said. "A few hours' quiet—that will do me good. Please don't be anxious. I'll be all right by noon."

I left her to the darkness and the quiet and went down to the professor. He had taken a great fancy to Lesley, and was distressed to hear she was ill. "Perhaps you rode too far yesterday," he said.

The remembrance of the ride brought back my American friend. I told the professor about him and the book.

"You might have asked him to call," he said. "I should have been pleased to make his acquaintance."

"He is staying here for another day. Perhaps he will call," I said. "He is not at all a bashful young man, and evidently bent on making the most of his opportunities. He did the castle, the village and the Beacon Cove yesterday. I wonder what his plans are for to-day?"

"Ask him to lunch," said the professor, "if you see him—or you might send a note down to the inn."

"I have to go to the village," I said. "I will leave a note if you write it."

He did write it, and I started off as soon as breakfast was over.

I had little fear of *not* seeing Dr. Quain. It was difficult to miss anybody in Scarffe. I saw him in the porch of the inn, smoking a cigarette and reading a newspaper. He recognized me with pleased surprise.

"I reckon you'll supply the want of sunshine," he said as we "shook." "It's good to see you on such a morning."

"I've brought you a note from the professor," I said, handing it. "I was coming down to one of the shops, so I said I'd be postman."

"You're doing me a great honor," he said, "and this is most kind of Professor Trent. I assure you I appreciate it ver-ry much. I was just wondering what I should do with myself. I thought of walking to that old church on the hill—Quinton Lacy is the name, I believe. Is it worth seeing?"

"I hardly think so. The walk is pretty and the village rather quaint, but the church is an old, dreary building. They don't use it for service any longer. The churchyard is very old. Do you care about churchyards?"

"Well, not ver-ry much," he said, smiling. "Kind of melancholy, aren't they? Perhaps I might walk with you while you're shopping, and we could have another interesting talk — unless, of course, you'd rather not."

"I have no objection. Would you care to go to the ruins again?"

"Certainly I should—care. More especially with such a charming guide."

I ignored the compliment, and after calling at the shop took him all round the outer walk which surrounded the castle, and which the public were graciously permitted to use free of charge. I gave him a great deal of information which I had received from the professor, and for which he seemed grateful. Then we went up to the ruins, and I took him to "my" tower, as I called it. From there we had a wonderful view. Suddenly, however, the threat-

ened rain poured down, and we had to beat a retreat.

"I guess I was right to come prepared," he remarked. "If you stand under this corner of the wall, Miss Trent, I'll put up my collapsible."

"Collapsible?" I gazed about, and at his hands. "What is that?"

He smiled effulgently, and produced from the pocket of his coat a curious-looking article which resembled an apoplectic ruler.

This he began to unscrew and unfold, and fit and fix, until, to my amazement, it represented an umbrella.

"Ingenious, ain't it?" he said, as the thing widened out like an inflated mushroom. "I guess you haven't seen anything like *that* before?"

"No, I haven't," I said. "And now that I have been privileged, may I ask what's the advantage? You could be drenched to the skin before you got the thing fixed into shape, and even then it's a clumsy-looking article!"

"Well, it does take some time to fix," he allowed. "But then it's easy stowed away; goes into your pocket."

"It would look a great deal better in your hand, *if* it were presentable."

"Don't seem to please you—somehow."

I laughed. "What funny people you are! I was thinking of some of the things you told me yesterday."

"I wish you'd let me tell you something to-day."

"What is it?"

"That you're just about the nicest, prettiest, sweetest little girl I've ever met. But I guess you've

heard that so often that it makes no difference for an American cousin to say it."

"Well," I said, "I haven't considered you in the light of a cousin—yet."

"Couldn't you begin?"

"I could; but what would be the use?"

"Seems friendly like. And we did get along fine yesterday. You remember our talk?"

"Of course I do. We said a great deal to very little purpose, and you quoted a great deal of poetry, mostly American."

"You said you liked it."

"So I did—yesterday."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that I don't bring the same thoughts or the same feelings to bear upon this marvellous 'invention,' as I brought to accommodating my horse's pace to yours."

"Never mind the invention, so long as it keeps the wet off your pretty hair."

"Is that an insinuation that the color might 'run'?"

"I see you're up for teasing. But I don't mind. I guess this is pretty comfortable."

"How long does the average American girl take to accommodate herself to the average Englishman?" I asked.

"Well, just about as long as it took me to get friendly with you. She's not artificial or conventional."

"I see. And is it my fault or yours that we can't be conventional?"

"A little of both, I take it. You find something ver-ry interesting in the study of that foot of yours, Miss Trent? I haven't seen the color of your eyes since the rain came on."

"You seem to associate my coloring with a tendency to be spoilt by wet," I said. "My eyes are all right—I only use my tongue for talking."

"That's so. And you can make amazing good use of it. I guess you're not so friendly as you were yesterday. Have I been so unfortunate as to offend?"

"I'm never offended when a man talks sensibly. But I hate compliments and personal remarks."

"I am ver-ry sorry. But it's hard to keep to quite impersonal things when—there's a person who makes herself more important than—the things."

"What a lucid remark!"

"A mighty ordinary, commonplace one! I——"

"You are the person, and the Patent Collapsible is the thing! And the rain's over, and we might be getting home. I've left my friend ill in bed, and it seems very unkind to be so long away."

"The pretty, disdainful young lady who was with you yesterday?"

"She's not disdainful!"

"Certainly not, if you say so. But she looked a fairly good imitation of the—adjective. See here, Miss Trent, we'll be quarrelling presently. S'pose we start the conversation afresh. You gave me a good time yesterday. What's wrong with to-day?"

"Nothing—except the weather."

"Does it always affect you like this?"

"Like what?"

"You know very well—sort of putting out porcupine quills at every remark I make."

I felt indignant.

"When anything is an effort it is sure to be a failure," I said. "Your efforts have spoilt my appreciation."

"That's very hard. Because I can't drag my mind away from *you*—and to talk about anything else is an effort. When I got up this morning I felt immense. I was so happy. And now for the last five minutes I've been just as miserable."

"Your people always use big words to express little things," I said cruelly. "And you're no exception, Dr. Quain."

I slipped out from the shade of the collapsible into a brief glint of sunshine. "Do put down that odious thing and be sensible," I said.

He opened his lips as if to make a remark, but he didn't. Only hauled down, and unscrewed, and unfixed the remarkable invention that I had failed to appreciate.

I watched the process. But for a certain look in his face I should have laughed riotously.

I was learning to know that look—now.

CHAPTER VII.

I HAD never seen the professor so amused, and apparently so interested, as he was by the conversation and varied information of Dr. Quain.

It appeared to me that my new friend could talk on any subject. If he was not very well informed on it, he limited himself to questions, put as assertions, and learned enough by this means to take one side of an argument.

Lesley, who had come down to luncheon, appeared as interested as the professor, though we agreed afterward that the intricacies of dental surgery left us fervently thankful that Nature was likely to make us both independent of such assistance for a good many years to come.

After luncheon we discussed plans for the afternoon. The rain had cleared, the sun was shining brilliantly. Dr. Quain suggested a drive, and forthwith betook himself to the inn to see what vehicle was possible for the purpose.

He returned in half an hour's time, driving a nondescript machine, with a weedy-looking animal between the shafts, whose only recommendation was that it could "go."

And go it did!

Up hill and down dale, through roads and lanes, past fields where the blue of cornflower and scarlet of poppy made but one flash of color; under shade of elm and birch and firs and pines; taking the hard,

old Roman road at a harder trot; giving an occasional shy at a stray sheep, a fluttering bird or a heap of stones on the roadway; jolting and jogging in a fashion that made comfort impossible, and conversation a gasp, until finally our charioteer drew rein on the crest of a hill and with a cheerful smile remarked that we'd done eight miles, and he guessed that wasn't so bad for the "hire system."

"Oh, do stop for five minutes! You've shaken all the breath out of me," I implored.

"Why, didn't you like it?" he asked with compunction. "If I'd got you behind an American spider I wonder what you'd have said then?"

"Said—I'd have shrieked! If there's one insect I detest in this world of insects it's a spider."

"I didn't mean an insect. It's a vehicle. And it *can* cover ground, you bet. A fast trotter in front of it don't let you trouble much more about scenery than a passing comet."

"Then I'm thankful you haven't one here," I said ungratefully. "No wonder you people have not the art of enjoyment. You seem to do everything at a rush, from viewing an imperial city to taking a country drive. You can't expect to hear Nature's stories at full gallop."

He glanced at the smoking steed, and then at the wide-lying prospect, so pastoral and peaceful and typically English. Cottages, harvest-fields, meadows gold and green; above—a sky whose radiance was dazzling; around—that circle of the everlasting hills; and yet again, sweeping to the far horizon line, the blue of the waveless sea.

"It is pretty," he allowed. "But if you only saw the Adirondacks."

"I can appreciate English scenery without the aid

of comparison," I said, being in a mood as aggressive as breathlessness and aching bones would excuse. "As for the Adirondacks——"

I paused, then raised a directing finger. "Do you see those white cliffs out seaward? Well, they protect one of England's loveliest isles—a fairyland that shelters the home of one of the greatest, noblest and most beloved of reigning sovereigns.* There again"—with another sweep of the hand, "is a bit of English history—a church and castle that date from A. D. 690—around which the strength of our throne and the records of our faith are linked. Isn't that better than your Adirondacks?"

(I am ashamed to say I knew nothing of what the Adirondacks were, but the name prejudiced me. I could never dissociate it from tin tacks and hardware!)

"It's certainly ver-ry interesting," he observed. "But monarchy not being a constitutional thing with us, we naturally couldn't have any palaces lying about. But—as far as scenery goes, well, I've not come across any this side to *beat* ours."

"Why should you want it beaten?" I inquired innocently. "That sounds as if it were a carpet kind of scenery that you take up and lay down when the fancy takes you!"

"I guess that's meant to be smart, Miss Trent," he said good-naturedly. "But you must know very well, judging what a lot you've read, that our American Continent is a most astonishing place."

"We will leave it at that," interposed Lesley, quietly. "There is an old proverb, Dr. Quain, that says, 'Comparisons are odious.'"

*This was written, alas! while yet the beloved sovereign was England's reigning Queen.

"You're right, Miss Heath, they are. It's my fault for introducing a bit of our national boastfulness into the subject. We have a cheerful irreverence for all things connected with a crowned head, or an imperial government, or a patented nobility. I know I ought to have said, 'Ladies—this is a most charming bit of English scenery, and ver-ry typical.' Now, shall we get along?"

I laughed. "Oh, you're incorrigible! I had a great deal more to point out."

"What's that high, white building to the right among the trees, with the flag floating around?"

"That," I said, "is Quinton Court, the seat of Lord St. Quinton. He has the finest property about here."

"Oh, where that old church is—I've not seen it yet."

"We might drive round there and drop in at the Court for tea," suggested Lesley.

"Will you?" he asked eagerly. "I'd love to see that Court. I heard the interior was magnificent enough for royalty."

"Oh, royalty has very simple tastes," I said. "It is far too sensible to live up to 'gilded splendor.' When you're to the 'manner born,' Dr. Quain, your own consciousness of power and prerogative doesn't require external advertisement."

He made no answer, but sent the "goer" on once more.

"You're very hard on him," whispered Lesley, as we descended the hill jerkily. "What's he done? The usual thing?"

"Does it look like that?"

"Very much like that. An unusually quick case, but then his nation never do things at our rate of

speed. I believe the next generation will get through love, courtship and marriage by electricity."

We were hurled down into the valley again, and I told him breathlessly the road to take. As we entered the village I saw one of the Court carriages coming toward us. In it were Lady St. Quinton and Lady Brancepeth.

It stopped; and Dr. Quain drew his animal up almost on its haunches.

"Come in and have tea," said Lady St. Quinton. "I've something to tell you, Paula."

"We were just going to call," I answered.

"That's right. We're on our way home now."

I saw her glance inquiringly at my new friend, so I introduced him without his initials or degrees. I knew *they* would come out before the acquaintance dated ten minutes.

"We'll just drive round to the old church, and then follow you," I said.

"I never knew the old church was anything but an eyesore," said Lady Brancepeth. "I see you still keep up your habit of labeling trifles 'Important.'"

"The importance rests with the way you regard them," I said.

"And who shares in the regard?" she said, with one of her insolent smiles.

"Please drive on," I said to Dr. Quain, and a touch of the whip took our Pegasus out of earshot and eyesight.

* * * * *

There were some half dozen people in the hall when we arrived. Some of them Lesley and I had met in town.

Two sisters—the Misses Featherleigh—who were renowned for “skirt dancing.” A certain Dickey Wren, who was an excellent amateur actor, an equally excellent musician, and lived on an epigrammatic reputation and—debts. Who paid the debts or allowed him credit was a mystery, but his usefulness in the art of providing country house parties with amusement helped him along the road of life as well as any profession would have done. Lord “Bobby” was here again, and greeted me with effusion. My rejected admirer—Tommy Yelverton—was also to the fore, looking more dissipated and vacuous than when in town, and apparently ready for “the third time of asking.”

We sat down and had tea, and Lady St. Quinton made herself very charming to the American, perhaps scenting the proverbial “dollar” as recommendation, or else desirous of knowing how and where her “charge” had picked him up. That same charge was inwardly thanking Fate for a season in town that had robbed her tongue of *gaucherie* and her nerves of fear.

She was capable now of entertaining Lord Brancepeth and “Tommy Dodd” at one and the same moment, and neither seemed to wish themselves in better company.

Lesley was dignified and somewhat silent. But the *aura* of forthcoming marriage surrounded *her*. She was an object of respectful interest. The Lorely lounged on one of the divans, and kept Dickey, or “Dickey-bird,” as she called him, in constant attendance upon her.

After a time I discovered why Lady St. Quinton had wished to see me. She was getting up an entertainment for the organ fund, and it had been

arranged to take the form of "out-door" theatricals. The balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet" was to be given on a real balcony, with real moonlight. "Wasn't that a novel and delightful idea?" she asked.

"Guess you'd better square the Metereological Office before you fix the date," interposed Dr. Quain. "Or arrange two ways, so that you can have your performance indoors or out. A thunderstorm would make pretty short work of Juliet's love speeches."

"Oh, it will be full moon. And the August moon is a dependable one," said Lady St. Quinton.

"I think it is a lovely idea," I said rapturously. "Who's going to act?"

"Oh, the principals are to be professionals, and Dickey (Mr. Wren, you know) is to stage manage, and play a minor part. Then we shall have a scene or two from 'As You Like It,' and all the seats are to be arranged in a semi-circle among the trees."

"It's a smart notion," said the American, "and ought to catch on here. When did you say the entertainment was to come off, Lady St. Quinton?"

"To-morrow week. If you are staying in this neighborhood, doctor, I should be pleased——"

"Madame," he interposed, with a polite bow, "I shall consider it a duty I owe to myself and my country to stay in this neighborhood and to be a witness of this ver-ry interesting—performance. I guess I can scatter around the country and see some more of your celebrated antiquities, and be back again in time to hear Romeo swear fidelity to Juliet. I've had the pleasure of visiting your Shakespeare's birthplace, and I shall look forward to hearing his masterpiece with double enthusiasm."

"Very well," said Lady St. Quinton, "we'll leave it—conditional."

"Put it so, if *you* please, and I will record the date in my notebook, and keep an eye on the weather."

"You seem distrustful of our weather," I observed. "I suppose you've not found your patent defence very useful?"

"I've found it less satisfactory since—yesterday," he said, meaningly.

"If it were your own patent?" I said.

"No such luck, I assure you."

"Well, if it were, I'd like to buy the exclusive right——"

"And bring it out *here*?" he asked eagerly.

"Exclusive right," I went on remorselessly. "So that it might never again intrude upon anyone's sense of inartistic fitness."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE talk was all of the theatricals. They seemed to rival the record "bags" and record sportsmen. Lady St. Quinton wished Lesley and myself to take part in them, but I refused. Lesley, however, did consent to play a small part in "As You Like It," and to stay on the extra week in order to rehearse.

"It will be something to do," she said to me as we drove home. "And I want to keep away from town as long as I possibly can."

Dr. Quain detained me a moment as I wished him good-by.

"I want to ask one favor of you," he said. "They tell me it's worth climbing up that hill to the right of the castle to see the view at sunset. Would you be so kind as to walk up there with me?"

"Walk up?" I repeated. "Do you think I'm a fly? Climb up, you mean. You've no idea how steep it is?"

"Is it? I thought it was possible. Wouldn't you try?"

I hesitated. I knew perfectly well why he wanted me to go up to that hill summit. It would be kinder and wiser to refuse. But——

That overmastering desire to *know*, to read the workings of another mind, to trace the current of thought in another conquered heart swooped down on Paula in the form of an irresistible temptation.

She played with it by virtue of the "cat and mouse" element in her sex.

"I don't know whether Miss Heath would care about it. She is not very strong."

"Miss Heath! I wasn't asking her to exert herself."

"Oh!—you expect me to leave her, and mount that hill for sake of seeing a sunset with—you?"

"It does seem a bit presumptuous, I suppose. Yet that's what I had in my mind. You're a bit of a thought-reader, I see."

I laughed softly. "You certainly are the very strangest man I've ever met. Are you aware how long our acquaintance has lasted?"

"Seems as if I'd known you years. But, of course, I remember driving up here on that coach only yesterday. I've had a pretty wide and comprehensive experience, but I do allow *this* leaves a want of purpose in all the others. Won't you come up the hill and see the sunset?"

I glanced up at the steep peak and tried to picture Paula in that elevated position, studying her favorite "philosophy of cardiac anatomy."

Laughter bubbled up from an inexhaustible spring, and sentiment flew heavenward.

"I'll come," I said, "in half an hour's time."

I turned away lest he should discover that I was only mirthful—not impressed.

"Who is ever going to touch this heart of mine?" I asked myself.

Lesley was lying down, tired with the jolting of that dreadful drive. I told her I was going out to see the sunset. She lifted languid eyes.

"Out again—alone?"

"Not alone," I said. "I am taking a walk into a

lion's den. I'll relate the experience when I return."

"Oh, Paula! Paula!"

"Now, Lesley," I said calmly, "from first to last you have been a witness of the career of this—experience. Am I to blame? Can I say 'I won't talk'—'I won't jest'—'I won't laugh, dear Mr. Man, for fear you should fall in love with me as soon as I am introduced to you.'"

"I didn't think Americans were so susceptible."

"I suppose they conduct their courtships on the same lines as their other inventions," I said, going over to the glass to see if my hat was straight.

I looked at myself as steadily as uncontrollable laughter would allow.

"For the life of me, Lesley," I said, "I can't tell what makes men care about me!"

"Perhaps that's the best reason you can give for their caring. As a rule, a man falls in love with a woman because she is just the one person in the world he has no business to love."

"That rule scarcely applies to me."

"No—not yet. But your day has to come. At present—indifference shields you most effectually."

I wheeled suddenly round. "Are you very tired, dear? Do you mind my leaving you? It's so hard to remember I ought to be playing hostess."

"If you want to be kind," she said, "you'll treat me exactly as you've always done. For the present I'd be glad of an hour or two of rest. I seem to tire so quickly now."

I kissed her silently and went away. The memory of that story she had told went with me, and I left my mirth behind.

* * * * *

The light was red above the gray, clustering roofs of Scarffe as I mounted the sharp ascent. A rough foot-track led me round to where the slope grew abrupt. Here I found Dr. Quain awaiting me.

"I reckon it's steeper than I thought," he said. "Let me help you."

By aid of his stick, and occasionally of his hand, I clambered up.

The height overlooked not only the castle and the village, but two distinct counties. The dome of the sky was like a tent, whose blue, silken sides clasped the dusky circle of the hills. Feathery clouds of rose and gold floated over this arch of blue, and all the lovely width of burnished water shone like a mirror of gold as the sun began to sink.

Breathless and silent I stood, and he was silent, too.

So near, so mystic, looked that sapphire wonder of the sky, so near those rosy, drifting clouds, it seemed as if heaven stooped to kiss the earth "good-by" ere taking back its gift of light.

And still the change went on, and cloud and color took or lost a splendor as the last gold flashed from the crown of day. Then a wonderful light, clear and purple as an amethyst, stole up from behind the greater glory, and the rosy clouds paled.

The circle of those hills which shut in the old, old town and the older ruins from the noise and confusion of the modern world, showed once more gray and green against the fading light.

Water, cliffs, bare harvest-fields and gold-starred meadows lost their momentary vividness, and seemed to glide away into a hazy distance. The brilliant tints changed to twilight's dusk. A cold wind blew over the hills, and chilled me.

"You shivered," he said at last, breaking the silence. "I hope you're not cold."

The intrusion of mere physical inconvenience on such a moment jarred on me.

I walked on, and made no answer.

After a few yards, I stopped abruptly with an exclamation of disgust.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The usual vulgar tourist has been adorning even this place with his insignificant initials!" I exclaimed, pointing to the letters cut into the turf at our feet. "One would think a scene and spot like this would eliminate this caddish craze. But it hasn't. There are men, I believe, who would risk their lives to climb a mountain, or take a balloon to the highest pyramid only for the glory of cutting their names on ice or granite!"

"I'm afraid you have not much toleration for weakness," he said. "But, you see, Paula, you're very young."

"Don't call me Paula," I said. "I'm not an American girl!"

"I wish you'd let me make you into one," he said. "I do feel as if I'd give all the world for you. They say love at first sight is the best love, and I reckon that's what it was with me. Just took it bad, and can't seem to get over it anyway."

The old, old chill swept over me at those words. How much did he mean? how much did he care? And why should he care so quickly? What did he know of Paula—the *real* Paula?

"Have I offended you?" he asked humbly. "I was looking at your face when that beautiful sunset was going on" (he spoke of it as of a pyrotechnic

display got up for his benefit) "and it seemed to me so sweet and gentle and holy."

(No Paula could stand *that*.) I flashed out:

"What you saw in my face wasn't me at all; only the reflection of that wonderful light. What you—care for in me, isn't *me* at all, either; only the reflection of your own feelings. How can you possibly fancy you are in love with a girl to whom accident introduced you, and of whose life and heart and nature you are absolutely ignorant?"

"I can only answer that by saying your face came to me suddenly as the one face capable of rousing such a feeling. I can't get away from it, or from *you*. But then it's no use trying to explain love. You know it when you feel it, and it seems to lift you right straight into Paradise without any need of wings! Only to catch sight of you, Paula, seems to make my heart just like a summer's day; I feel poetry all through me and would like to shake hands with all the world. I can't explain why, but it's *so*. As one of our sweetest poets says, 'No other love finds room within my heart.' And again . . .

" 'For love's sake I can put e'en art away,
Or anything which stands 'twixt me and you.' "

- would have given anything to take him seriously, but that unfortunate lapse into poetry brought not only the Boffins of Dickens's *Mutual Friend* into my head, but also what Captain Cuttle calls "the application of it." And the idea of "art" as associated with the sacrifice of American dentistry overthrew the whole situation. I began to laugh hysterically. The more I tried to restrain myself the worse I became.

He looked very angry, and I attempted an apology.

"It's—it's—it's the poetry," I gasped. "Poetry always upsets me—it did at school."

"School!" he said wrathfully. "I reckon a girl who can talk like you has left school a long way behind her—long enough to know better than make sport of a man's feelings."

"I'm not making sport of your feelings," I said. "I'm very sorry if you take it so seriously, but for goodness' sake don't drop into verse about it."

"I shan't drop into anything," he said; "I s'pose it's no good. If you had cared, ever such a little bit——"

I went through my newly acquired formula of proffered friendship and regard, but whether he found laughter still lurked behind, or the wound was deeper than I imagined, his wrath only increased. He stood driving holes into the ground with his stick, and kept his eyes sullenly averted.

"I am very sorry," I repeated. "But, if you come to think of it, a girl can't make up her mind to love, marry and obey for the rest of her natural life a man she's only met twice. At least I'm not the sort of girl. I should want to know a great deal about the—the person. His mind; and his nature, and" (as an after thought) "his temper. Why think, even in this case," I went on cheerfully, "I might be a shrew, a vixen, a——"

"You're none of these," he said drily. And he lifted his head and looked into my eyes at last. "But I'll tell you what you've a fair chance of becoming if you'd care to hear—and that's a coquette."

CHAPTER IX.

I SAT alone in my room, and meditated on the many different ways men propose.

I had come home in a mood of indignation, for my American friend had maintained a hurt and sulky silence, and I thought it was only due to myself to resent such a speech as that last one on the hill heights.

Coquette, indeed! Because I had not fallen in love to order; jumped into his arms as he opened them! No. On *this* occasion my conscience absolved me. It was true I had met him once by appointment, but surely there was no great harm in going to look at a sunset. It could scarcely be looked upon as direct encouragement of a proposal.

"The truth is," I had said to Lesley while we discussed the subject, during the labor of hair-brushing, "the truth is, Lesley, that men are so full of vanity and self-importance that they think they have only to ask and to have! They are not over and above tender to our feelings, but don't they cry out if their own are hurt!"

"You seem to have acquired a pretty successful knack of hurting them," she said.

"I can't help it," I said crossly, for I had never before failed in keeping a possible friendliness in view after previous rejection. "I like men just as I like certain books, certain amusements, but I really begin to think *things* are much nicer than people.

There's not one in a hundred I can like, much less love."

"Well, I don't blame you for not falling in love with Dr. Quain. He wasn't the sort of man to suit your tastes or your character. When you do marry, Paula, it will be a dangerous experiment. It's the inward side of everything you look at."

When she went to bed I took out *Friendship*, for which I had always had a sneaking kindness, and read of Ioris and Etoile, and wondered if it was *really* possible that a woman could love like that. Love—to the sacrifice of life, and art, and happiness. Love even when what she loved was unworthy.

I read this sentence:

"Once—was it yesterday, or was it a score of years away?—she had flown to her work with such joy in it that she never felt physical fatigue, or solitude, or any flight of time. Now—she only listened for one step. When she heard it not, the long, pale, weary day seemed cold as death, empty as a rifled grave!"

I closed the book.

"Empty as a rifled grave," I repeated. "Does it lie in any man's power to make my life like that? Full to overflowing, or empty as a rifled grave. Do these great, wonderful passions exist, or are they invented to mislead us?"

A dip into my own "treasury of knowledge" assured me that "love as an illusionist was without rival. It could make you forget everything except—love." But as if to counteract the force of that assertion another paragraph stated, "Love may be so completely disillusioned that the faithlessness of the person you love cannot even hurt you. It only

confirms your judgment; it does not affect your feelings. Your reasoning powers can lift you to heights that his can never touch. From that high altitude passion looks a poor and ill-controlled thing. You pity, you forgive, or you condemn, but rest assured that you can never give back your love, your faith, your *real* self as once you gave them. For you for evermore Love's face is veiled, and his voice powerless to enchant."

These were my mother's words. Like a talisman I kept that book forever with me. I had discovered two copies in the professor's bookcase and had taken one for my own use.

Rightly or wrongly it seemed to me that all the wisdom of a woman's heart lived in those pages. Whether glad or sorrowful, hopeful or perplexed, I could always find something in them to suit the need of my mood. Further on, my eyes lighted on a page of Fenella's own history. "Does this sound foolish?" she asked. "All sentiment is foolish. Yet a woman can live on it. But a man can't. Never expect it, and never blame him for what his nature has made impossible. For him life means strong meat, strong wine, strong passions. All else is mawkish and poor and beneath his attention. Of course I except—curates."

With a laugh I put away the book, saying to myself, "I wonder what she would have said to Mark Christopher Quain?"

* * * * *

At breakfast next morning the professor announced he had changed his mind, and would not lunch at the Court. We argued and pleaded, but all in vain. He had a paper to write for some forthcoming meeting and he would not be persuaded.

I kept indoors until it was time to leave. Lady St. Quinton sent a carriage for us as usual. I hoped that my American had taken himself off, and that there would be no fear of meeting him again until he returned for the theatricals. Surely by then he would have recognized his folly, or mine, and taken a dose of common sense to cure himself.

Lesley looked very lovely. She was all in white; the only bit of color about her was a cluster of Maréchal Niel roses with their green leaves fastened in the lace at her throat. The day was radiant, and my spirits equally so. I almost forgot Lesley's hidden tragedy. I certainly *did* forget the reproaches heaped upon my head by rejected lovers. I felt that youth and life, and sunshine and liberty were blessed things, and never a riddle among them that morning.

Toddling through a field that skirted the road to Quinton Lacy, I spied a figure. Bent, yet alert, quaintly garbed, and flourishing a stick at a recreant sheep that seemed to have followed a prayer-book formula and "done the thing it ought not to do."

"That's old Gregory Blox," I said to Lesley. "Shall we speak to him? He's such a character."

"Yes—do," she said, having heard from me of Merrieless' love affair, and the Lothario reputation of the ancient man.

So we drew up and I beckoned to Gregory, and forthwith he straightened his waistcoat, and gave his old straw hat a jaunty curve, and hobbled up to the victoria.

"Well, Mr. Blox, how are you?" I said. "I've been wondering what had become of you. I began to think you must be courting for the—how many times is it?"

"As many times as there were maids to listen," he said, chuckling. "But 'tain't for me no longer, miss, which you're kindly welcome, and the new London lady too, and a fine, handsome pair you do make, pardon the liberty of expressing."

"I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Blox," said Lesley. "I've heard a great deal about you."

"Is that so now, young lady? Well—well, they do say London gets knowledge of every thought and deed that's done, but I hadn't fancied bein' so honored as to have my small fortunes discussed in a varied metropolies. Such an old man as I be too. Heh—heh—heh! You'll be for makin' me that vain, honorable missies, that a sight o' looking-glasses won't be altering my faculties!"

It was long since I had heard Lesley laugh, but old Blox, with a belief in a London reputation and a looking-glass, would have made the veriest cynic smile.

"And have you been quite well?" I asked hastily.

"I might make mention o' a complaint or two but for fear o' offending such delicate female ears," he remarked. "A touch o' rheumatics, and a hint o' colic maybe, is allowable; not but the good lady at the farm is kind 'eno' in the way o' peppermint for the stomick, and linniment for the knees. Aye, I believe a' wouldn't ha' wintered through but for her."

"You mean Mrs. Herivale?"

"Aye, 'tis the mistress. The Lord's blessing on her! I'm thinkin' He'll need her to grace His courts afore He sends a messenger my way. There not being so special a need o' sinners as o' saints in them same courts o' glory. Maybe 'tis because I've

secreted mirth so long, that the serious side o' life has 'scaped me! I do begin a psalm tune now and then when the ale's warm, and the fire roarin' high, but the power o' melody in the voice isn't what it was in years ago, not apparingly to other folk's thinkin', and the compliments they will be payin', makes o' my inside as 'twas naught but blushes. And that's a discomfortin' feelin' for a man, be he old or young."

"I think we must say good-by now, Gregory," I said hurriedly. "I'll be round at the farm soon to see Mrs. Herivale. Will you tell her so, with my love?"

Oh, the delicious leer of his wicked old eye!

"Love—is it?—and I to be honored by the carryin' o't! 'Tis a terrible pleasurable situation, miss, and one that makes a chance o' obstinacy in a four-footed creature seem like a happy providence for him as had the fault o' strayin' laid on his shoulders, and took the field way yonder."

* * * * *

When we had laughed ourselves tired, Lesley and I agreed that English natural humor had been much neglected by those truth-seekers who have courted fame in the regions of fiction. Then she turned to me, as if by some impulse that memory had inspired. "By-the-bye, Paula, do you still keep that journal? You used to send me extracts from it, you remember?"

"Yes," I said. "But you didn't seem to appreciate them, so I gave it up."

I left her to decide what I had given up—the journal, or the transmission of its extracts. How could I tell her of my nightly tasks; of the secret pleasure those scribbled pages afforded; of her own

love-story transcribed; of the speculations it had aroused? No. A girl's confidence is only confidence while she is ignorant of the full meaning of life. Once she learns its possibilities, or its temptations, its excitements and its dangers, she feels that her own nature becomes secretive by force of emotions never hitherto experienced.

Girlhood stands like a sentinel awaiting Nature's call. The heart forbids the betrayal of a password, but the citadel is less eager of defence than conscious of weakness.

I looked at my school friend's lovely face, and remembered how long I had been left in ignorance of the great secret of her life.

"Lesley," I said abruptly, "you are a great disappointment. There was nothing I looked forward to so eagerly as the hearing of your engagement, or Claire's. I thought it would be just the most interesting——"

"Paula!" she cried warningly. "Who are you copying now?"

I laughed. "I ought to have said 'ver-ry.' But really, Lesley, think of our talks, of our expectations, our promises—where are they all?"

"Where the school days are, I suppose, and the girls who laughed, and chattered, and promised. I think, Paula, our life then was only an expenditure of mind-energy. We were so ignorant and we thought ourselves so wise. We believed that to wish and to have were identical. I wish education fitted us for life, instead of unfitting life for—us."

"You have grown sadly wise, Lesley. My 'spurts' are only second hand. I take my lessons from the philosophy of a life that *has* lived and suffered.

But I can't make it spontaneous or effective as you do—the philosophy, I mean.”

“So much the better for you, Paula. But you are far too interested and too observant to take either life or its philosophy at second hand. You have made a prologue interesting. What will the drama itself be?”

“Perhaps there will never be a drama. Only a long stage wait, and then a quick curtain.”

“Better that than a prolonged tragedy.”

“Lesley, I haven't forgotten what you said—that night. But I thought you would prefer I did not speak of it.”

She touched my hand. “I do prefer it, Paula. I want to get rid of sentiment. It is an enemy to life—woman's life. That life is hard enough, God knows. We enter on it with everything prescribed by a code of moral laws and social obligations. We must do the same things that other women have done, however different our natures or inclinations. Oh, Paula, the drilling I had! Even love, if so delicate a subject is touched upon, comes in form of a platitude—a thing hedged and ditched by moral maxims and prudent precepts; a sexless, limbless creation, of as much use to teach us life as our broken dolls are to teach us anatomy. Oh, it is hateful—hateful! And in this fashion we are set going—fetters clanking at every step! All the triumph and hope of youth forbidden or despoiled. Is it any wonder the iron enters the soul at last, and a woman becomes a secret sinner instead of a healthy rebel?”

The crimson on her cheek, the flash of her soft eyes transformed her into something of the spirited, fearless girl I had known.

My heart warmed. "Why not become a rebel?" I said eagerly. "Oh, Lesley, it's not too late! Give up this idea—this sacrifice. I hate to think of your marriage now. I dreamt last night of a field of waving grass, and out of it a snake crawled, its crest raised to strike! And you stood there alone, and looked at it, and I shrieked to you to move out of its way, and you only smiled. The horror of it woke me. There seemed such a little thing wanted to save you, and yet——"

"I wouldn't be saved. That's just it, Paula. I think I would rather face the fangs and have done with it."

She turned her eyes on me, and I saw something in their depths I could not reach, or even comprehend; that strange pathos which is like the suppressed pain of all humanity.

I could not bear that look, nor, in all my varied vocabulary of ready speech, could I find a single word to fit the situation, or my feelings respecting it.

So I held my peace, and in unbroken silence we reached the Court.

CHAPTER X.

"WE are going to have a hen-luncheon," said Lady St. Quinton, as she came to meet us. "The men are all off to the coverts, except Dickey, and he doesn't count. He's in the veranda now, talking stage traditions with Lorely and the American actress who is going to do Juliet for us. She came down last night, and everyone is raving about her."

"Why—an American Juliet?" I asked.

"Oh, my dear, all the Shakespearean actresses are resting, as the *Era* puts it—off for a holiday, or a tour, I suppose. Lorely had met Mrs. Desallion—or was it Dickey?"

"Desallion!" I cried. "You don't mean to say Mrs. Desallion is *here*?"

"Why not? You surely don't know her—except by repute?"

"No, of course not, but it seems so odd. Only the other day her name was brought up and I felt so interested in her, and to think she should be here—herself."

"I've often noticed," observed Lady St. Quinton, "that to talk of a person is a sure sign you're to meet at some near date. Psychic force or magnetism, I suppose. Very odd. Well, it must be the same Mrs. Desallion, because she's an American, and only just come over for a London engagement in the autumn." She looked keenly at me. "What did you hear?" she asked.

"Only that she was very beautiful, and"—I hesitated a moment—"that her hair was exactly like my own."

Lady St. Quinton studied my remarkable coils for a moment. "Not exactly," she said. "Hers is more vivid. The women say it's dyed. I wouldn't be sure. But now that you've spoken, Paula, I see what it was that puzzled me about her. She is like you. For instance, with your colored hair one generally expects to see blue eyes. Yours are hazel, you know, and so are Mrs. Desallion's, and she has the same arched brows, that make one think of pencils. But there the resemblance ends. She is taller, and her figure is simply perfect. She is as lithe as a gymnast. The only thing that spoils her is that American drawl. It sounds affected; but she says the cleverest things. However, you'll see her presently."

I felt strangely curious about this woman, though I could give no reason for it. We went into the broad, shady veranda, and there, stretched on a long wicker lounge, her dazzling head against a heap of blue and gold cushions, was the most beautiful and striking-looking figure I had ever seen.

I am writing this description hours after I have seen her, and yet she is so vividly before me that I could draw every shade of color and line of grace that represent her.

The red-gold of her hair had more of red and less of gold than mine, but, like mine, it had the loose, feathery wilfulness that always defied arrangement, that shook and shimmered in the sunlight as if each curl and tendril were a protest against restraint. Her attitude and expression, and the whole character of her beauty was an embodied rebellion. Vivid,

wilful, heartless — those were the adjectives with which I qualified the enthusiasm her personal charms awoke.

When Lady St. Quinton introduced Lesley and myself she scarcely deigned to notice us. Had it not been for a certain curious *stillness* that came to her face as her eyes met mine, I could have fancied she had not even heard my name.

But the stillness passed so rapidly, and the drooped lids were so supercilious in their indifference, that I was inclined to attribute the change to my imagination.

She had the strangest fascination for me, and yet I felt I had never shown to worse advantage. My glib tongue was silent; my brain refused to exert itself. The half-veiled sneers and taunts of Lady Brancepeth aroused no answering quips from me. I was like one in a dream, conscious only of this delicate vision, with the strange eyes and the languid, mocking voice.

Before the wisest, cleverest, most celebrated man I could have borne myself composedly, have spoken without effort, but this woman seemed to turn me into a dumb, awkward fool. If she glanced at me I flushed; if she asked me a question I could only summon a brief "Yes" or "No" by way of answer.

I saw Lesley look at me in surprise, and the Lorely with contemptuous amusement, but I could not gather my wits about me, and was thankful to keep in the background.

When she rose from that cushioned lounge and swept into the dining-room, I recognized what my chaperon had meant by saying she was as lithe as an athlete. She seemed to move as I had seen no other woman move. It was not only the grace and sup-

pleness of her figure, but the wonderful distinction of her carriage that made all the other women look awkward, or graceless, or vulgar. Even the Lorely was at a disadvantage for once.

No empress could have carried herself with greater dignity, or left a stronger impression of natural sovereignty than did this actress. She had no stage tricks, she never once talked "shop," she never sounded a single echo of her name and fame, but it was impossible not to feel that in some way, at some time, she had ruled and swayed the hearts of a multitude, even as now she swayed and fascinated individual units.

"You seem to have lost your wits, Paula," Lady Brancepeth had remarked. "I suppose the air of Sleepy Hollow has counteracted the benefits of the Row. Do you still find the ruins exhilarating, and Colin—resourceful?"

Several eyes turned to my crimson cheeks.

"Pray, who is Colin?" asked Lady St. Quinton.

"Quite a pastoral," murmured the eldest Miss Featherleigh, who had poetic tastes, and eyebrows that were a perpetual query. "Ruins—and Arcadia, and a swain whose name matches them."

"Colin," went on my tormentor, "is a handsome farmer, who has the advantages of education, the lineage of centuries, and the virtues of the country bumpkin!"

"Oh, you mean young Herivale!" said Lady St. Quinton. "I think 'country bumpkin' is hardly a fair description."

"Shepherd—perhaps is better," said the Lorely. "I think I have seen him with a crook in his hand, and a stray lamb in attendance."

"What sort of lamb?" drawled the cold, clear ac-

cents of Mrs. Desallion. "Young, I suppose, and—innocent?"

"Innocent as natural wool," said the Lorely, "with country prejudices undisturbed, and a tendency to bleat affection."

"I cannot understand how a pastoral idyl can possess a single element of content," observed Mrs. Desallion, languidly.

"Because the bucolic mind asks only to enjoy its possessions, and never questions the capacity of another mind to interfere with such enjoyment."

"Content is a great blessing," said Lady St. Quinton, in the copy-book-precept fashion she often adopted when girls were present. "I think it is such a comfort that the agricultural classes have it, for really they could make life very unpleasant for us if they chose."

"I think they do make it unpleasant," said the Lorely. "At least Bobby's tenants do. Perhaps Bobby isn't popular—I know he hates interviewing the steward, or being worried about roofs and pig-styes. Do your tenants ask for a new pig-stye every year, Pussy?"

"Perhaps your people are only asking for the same one that has never been given."

"Oh, perhaps that's it. I know Bobby gets into a dreadful rage, and his language is—well, not of the three divisions."

"What are the three divisions?" inquired Laura Featherleigh.

"Don't you know? Some clever person in the papers wrote that the English-spoken language might be divided into three variations on the original theme. Upper class—slang; middle class—

slovenly; lower class—sanguinary. But I think Bobby has discovered a fourth.”

“I never heard that before. But do we talk slang?”

“A pretty good imitation. What do you say, Dickey?”

“It depends on what class you consider you belong to!”

Lady Brancepeth laughed. “Is there a doubt in your mind?”

“My mind,” he answered, “is nothing but doubt. I once discovered a mistake in the Peerage, and since then I’ve begun to mistrust the Thirty-nine Articles, the Divine Right of Kings, and Mr. Chamberlain’s orchid.”

“Never mind the orchid. They imitate flowers so well now that it’s wise to adopt a scentless one. I ask again, are we slangy, as this man said?”

“We are all things to all men—on occasions,” said Dickey. “A newspaper stated the other day that the Prince of Wales had said ‘d——n’ to a clergyman.”

“Was the cleric lecturing his future sovereign?”

“Oh, no; only asked why he read a sporting paper on Sunday.”

“Wherefore ‘d——n’ for answer? I should have said, ‘For the same reason that you preach.’”

“But it couldn’t have been for the same reason!”

“Why not? The paper and the sermon come out on the same day.”

“Dickey, you are becoming so deliciously subtle that you’ll soon have to travel with an interpreter,” said Lady St. Quinton.

“You always do flatter me dreadfully. I wish

you would say something that would make me sorry you had said it."

"You are very—profound," drawled Mrs. Desal-lion. "It is almost sad to think how much of your existence must have been wasted in educating ordinary minds to your standard of comprehension."

"Now," he exclaimed, "I *am* sorry, but for you, not for myself. Your speech is an infringement of copyright!"

"What do you mean?"

"It's not original. I read it almost word for word in a book. As it was only last night I read the book, or rather that passage, I pronounce you a plagiarist."

"We are all plagiarists when we talk. Tell me the name of the book."

"I can't remember, but I'll show it you after luncheon. It's in the library."

"And do you mean to say," she inquired, with an odd look at his pale, expressionless face, "that you read that identical sentence in a book?"

"It was a book of aphorisms and cynical half-truths. A woman only writes half a truth, you know. She's so fond of compromises."

"Oh, then, this was a woman's book."

"I concluded it was. But I never look for an author's name. If I like a book I read it. If I don't, I don't. It doesn't matter to me who writes it."

"You must be a boon to Mudie's," said Lady St. Quinton.

"And to anonymous authors," said Lady Brancepeth.

"I should like to see that book," said the American actress.

"I will show it to you with pleasure. It is a book of the purely feminine temperament. The neurotic, discontented, semi-cynical temperament of the modern woman. She rails at everything, because her innate discontent with life doesn't alter life."

"Nothing alters life. It only alters *you*," murmured Mrs. Desallion. Her eyes took a sombre, inward look, as if she were gazing at mental pictures.

"We are afraid of ourselves," observed Dickey. "The endeavor to be original is far too exhausting for general use. To copy is so easy; to lead, so unpopular."

I was watching Mrs. Desallion; looking at the red curves of her closed lips, the dreamy droop of her heavy-lidded eyes. How she interested, and yet disturbed me!

I was dimly conscious of fresh impulses at work within me, that seemed urged into being by no conscious will of my own. And now—even now in the silence of midnight, in the quiet surroundings of my own room, I feel that same fear at work again.

What had this woman known, felt, seen? What lurked in the sombre depths of those eyes? What secret chord vibrated to the music of that mocking voice? For even when she spoke she seemed to listen within *herself*.

I cannot express it in any other way. I cannot express *her*. I only know that I could excuse a man any madness, any folly committed for sake of this woman. But if she loved him, then indeed would he know the full and uttermost depths of—unhappiness.

It seemed to me that the very fact of yielding herself to any one of the sensations, whose experi-

ence she coveted, would be an argument against its possible powers of satisfaction.

As I wrote this, memory flashed back along its signal wire the laughing words of Dickey Wren.

That book from which Nina Desallion had quoted—which he had taken her to the library to see—was there not something familiar in its style, and in that very plagiarism?

Were not the words now staring me in the face, less the utterance of my own thoughts, than the memory of another's? I stretched a hand to the little brown volume on the shelf above my writing table. I turned over the pencil-marked leaves. So often I had read them that I could almost place my finger on a desired paragraph at will.

Here I copy two:

"To be profound is the sign of a wasted existence. Wasted because spent in educating the ordinary (or unappreciative) mind to your own standard of comprehension."

"An innate discontent with life doesn't alter life—but oh! how it alters yourself!"

The first paragraph was almost identical with Nina Desallion's remark to Dickey Wren. The second was also a plagiarism, applied to my own theory of Nina Desallion's character.

And both were contained in *Fenella's Confessions*.

CHAPTER XI.

LIFE formed itself into a very pretty picture for the week that followed, but my impatience to march to interests and conquer results left me too restless to write of it in detail.

Those luncheons and teas at the Court, the rehearsals, the chatter, the mirth, the cynicisms and follies and extravagances formed a brilliant panorama that I could not describe while it lasted. Amidst it all one figure was the centre of all interest and all attraction. It seemed to me, however, a little strange that Nina Desallion should always avoid me. And, in contrast to that avoidance, was her openly confessed affection for Lesley.

With Lesley she would talk by the hour. It was Lesley she chose as companion for a stroll through park or gardens; Lesley she coached in the part she was to play at the forthcoming theatricals. But did I approach them her manner altered, she grew cold and distant, and very soon would leave us together, or call in some one of her ever-watchful courtiers to prove the proverb that "three were no company" when *I* was the third. Yet I was only the more fascinated, the more admiring. I worshipped this strange woman with that curious, devoted, all-absorbing passion a girl very often feels for some brilliant prototype of her own sex. She was so wonderful! Over and over again I said that of her to Lesley.

So wonderful. When she rehearsed even the smallest part she enchained attention. When she spoke Juliet's lines I could have wished myself Romeo, only to have believed that liquid, impassioned utterance addressed to myself. For when she acted she dropped all Americanisms, and her voice had a charm as powerful as her own personality.

I try to make allowance for girlish enthusiasm now that that magical week has gone, and she—has gone with it. I try to think I was carried off my feet by her genius and inexplicable charm. I try to convince myself that Niña Desallion was heartless, cruel, unprincipled—since the kindest voice I have ever listened to called her these—since I saw a gray head bent in sorrowful abandonment over an unfinished work, and learned that the tears of age are wrung from the soul's bitterest anguish and the heart's most agonized shame.

How to write of it?

* * * * *

I am alone once more and Lesley has gone, and the house party broken up, and a new Paula faces me in my regained solitude.

A Paula, shuddering and half afraid of some unconfessable discovery. A Paula, hovering on the brink of a question she dare not ask. A Paula gazing with frightened eyes at sorrow, and praying that its touch should be averted.

"Not yet," cries her heart—"not yet. A little longer to believe, and laugh, and jest. A little longer to think Love has some truth, Honor some meaning, Life some joy. That youth is something better than a spent lamp with the light gone out—that there are wonderful and beautiful things in

Nature to which one's own soul brings the rapture of recognition. A little longer—only a little longer!"

* * * * *

The pen fell even as I wrote. The growing fear within me showed its face without a mask. I dare not breathe to living soul what that face told me—even here I dare not write it.

* * * * *

Paint to yourself a child straying along a highway, and confronted with danger, clutching eagerly at a helping hand. The hand withdraws its aid; the puzzled, appealing look meets no response, the aid that was so possible and so desired has passed. The child knows itself forsaken—but is ignorant of the cause.

* * * * *

Paint again the first faith and hopefulness of youth. Listen to its laugh—read the untroubled soul through clear, untroubled eyes. Hear it appeal to all the wonder-speech of gathered wisdom, and pray, "Speak to me." But the voice of woman mocks, and the voice of man is cold, and the voice of Life cruel, and the jangling discords hold no meaning and no comfort.

The counsel so desired is valueless, and the pleading voice asks—Why?

* * * * *

Had ever hart panted for the water brooks more ardently than Paula's soul had desired the meaning of Life?

Love had come and left her unmoved and uncaring. Friendship was a meaningless bond that held a promise and withdrew a heart. Experience, as yet but brief and shallow, had preached false phil-

osophies, was full of pathetic reaction, leaving only a sense of loss and disillusion after every lesson.

Full of misgiving, full of dread, she looked out on life now, and whispered fearfully, "God—do not let *this* be true."

* * * * *

It is often unwise to question a feeling too closely—to analyze an emotion at its source; but to peer into the hidden mechanism of an unnameable dread is to suffer such terror as haunts the darkness of long-closed rooms where the dead seem still to linger.

Could the dead I had mourned still live? Could that beautiful face of purity and loveliness, and genius and truth, have become suddenly only the mask of a living shame?

Could it be possible that——

I flung the pen away in a sudden fury.

"I *will* ask him! he shall tell me!" I said.

* * * * *

There was no light in the room I entered, save what poured from the full golden splendor of the harvest moon.

The window opened to the ground, and seated beside it in the old worn chair was the familiar figure.

Something in its bent and weary attitude—something in the lined and patient face, struck chillingly on my own excited nerves.

I went up to him and knelt down on the footstool by his chair.

"Why—Paula!" he said. "Not in bed—at this time of night. Is anything the matter, my dear?"

"Yes," I said, "a great deal is the matter. I want

the truth about—myself. You have never told it me.”

I seemed to feel the curious tremor that ran through his frame as I met the unquiet distress of his eyes with the question of my own.

“The truth,” he repeated. “I—I half expected this. Ask your questions, Paula; I will answer them if I can.”

His tone was very quiet; his eyes went to the garden, where flower and leaf lay washed in dew, and steeped in radiance.

“It is about my—mother,” I said. “Had she ever a sister?”

He was silent so long that I was about to repeat the question when he turned toward me. My hand lay on his knee; he took it in his own, laying it palm upward, and seeming to give it careful attention.

“I know,” he said, “why you ask that—I wish it were possible to say ‘Yes,’ but it isn’t—possible.”

“Then,” I pursued relentlessly, “am I to understand that you consciously deceived me? That she never died—that when you sat beside me under the trees at Quinton Court and saw that figure on the balcony and heard that voice, it was not illness that made you faint—it was memory and—recognition?”

His hand closed spasmodically on my own, crushing my fingers with a pressure that hurt.

“Oh, my dear, I acted for the best. When Stephen lay broken, dying, and told me she had left him, I promised to keep the story from you—if I could. He tried to make me believe she was not to blame, but with his death I mourned her own. A worse death, a crueller fate—the death of honor

and faith and womanly purity. From that hour I heard or saw nothing of her until she flashed before me on that moonlit balcony—lovely—radiant—entrancing as ever. It seemed as if a blow had struck me. You said afterward I fell back in the chair and some one helped me away. It spoilt your evening, Paula—but pray heaven it may not spoil your life as—others' have been spoilt."

I knelt there and heard in a sort of blind stupor.

This—the end of that story woven around the mother I had worshipped in my memory.

This—the true history of the radiant, lovely woman I had envied and admired so passionately. This—the fruit of all that beauty, all that genius—that conquering charm which could play at, and win, and lose love as lightly as a game of cards.

When the numbness passed, a sense of horror and of shame swept over my heart and filled me with a fierce rage. To have adored unworthiness, to have worshipped at the shrine of a false image, to have studied that spurious philosophy, and believed it the truth of life and the outcome of a reality that proved itself now the veriest sham!

Oh, what blind folly had been mine! She had never been true to a single feeling, a single sentiment of the sorrow, and the love, and the sentiment she had described so well. She had never loved aught save herself, or how could she have deserted husband and child?—left the one to death and the other to charity—not even deigning a sign of recognition, a passing word of tenderness, when chance had brought us face to face.

That stung! *That* hurt. Her attraction for me, my worshipping adoration of her, my foolish timidity in her presence, seeing only a loveliness I

envied, and a charm that now showed itself the cloak of unpardonable dishonor. She must have known me from the first, and yet had never vouchsafed a sign that would have ranked me higher in her interests than a stranger!

Suddenly, above the racking turmoil within me I heard the professor's voice again.

"It is a sad story—a painful story to meet you on the threshold of life. I would have kept it from you if I could. What made you suspect, Paula?"

"I hardly know. First I only wondered at the likeness. Then she said things that were in her book. That seemed odd to me, and I read them over again, and suddenly—how I cannot tell—a feeling grew up within me that there was something more than chance in it; and Lesley told me that she was always questioning her, always wanting to know about my life, my bringing-up, my characteristics. But it was only when I began to write it all down that the fear took shape and the truth dawned upon me. Something seemed to say this woman was not a mere stranger, not some one chance had thrown across my path, and I remembered your agitation, that strange seizure, your broken words—I resolved to ask you for the truth!"

"What a truth!—" I cried passionately. "Oh, fool that I was! Couldn't I have been content to go on as I was going? Why must I forever dig, and search, and pry, and question? Why did you tell——"

"Ah, child, don't speak so," he entreated. "You asked, and I could not deny. I thought the question would come soon or late. I thought she might have bidden you—ask me."

"She!—she never spoke to me unless she was obliged; gave me less notice than the dogs that crouched at her feet. Let me be made sport of, fooled, by those other hateful women. Left me without word or sign as she has always done!"

"Not always, dear," he pleaded. "She loved you when you were a little child. She was good to you then. Once—when you were recovering from some childish illness and had run into the garden—the dew was falling, I remember—and I and Stephen were at the window talking—she suddenly snatched up a little gray shawl that was hanging on a chair, and ran out and wrapped it round you. 'How thoughtful she is!' said Stephen. Then I knew she loved you, Paula—even if she loved nothing else."

I was silent. Something within me struggling for expression, beaten back, unbelieving.

"I—I kept that little shawl," he said, his quiet, tender voice breaking on the stillness and on the waves of that rebellious sea raging within my soul. "Some day, Paula, I will give it to you—if you care to have it—because that night at least her heart was full of her little child—and she was true woman and true mother for the last time."

"That," I said breathlessly, "was the last time—before she left my father."

"The next morning she had gone," he answered.

"I will not have it," I said, coldly and relentlessly. "She never loved even that little child. She only played at sentiment."

What cut my words short and sharp? What held me like a prisoner, caught suddenly in unexpected chains of his own forging? What struck me like a blow with my own use of my own words?

Who played at sentiment if not Paula? Who

took each phase of life as it came to her and laid it on the dissecting table of her own curious mind, and spared neither herself nor others in the research, if not Paula? Who had listened to false wisdom and aped the mountebank tricks that lead women into deadly peril? Who had questioned the hidden paths that morbid fancies and sated passions tread in search of pleasure? Who had asked to know, and know, and still could never know enough, if not—Paula?

And now I knew why.

In my veins ran the same blood that had poisoned that other life. In my heart lurked perhaps the same passions. She had cared only to conquer and to charm and enslave! She stood now upon the throne of the world's favor, and had earned the coveted distinction of notoriety. She had walked to triumph over broken hearts, without pity, without remorse.

Her face showed no signs of grief, her eyes no shame of the dead sins of those dead years to which I belonged—whose fatal fruits might be my heritage.

* * * * *

In that hour I lost youth as I lost faith.

I went away, and back to my room, and to my written confessions, and then—that night—I took those other Confessions and tore them leaf after leaf from their cover. Tore them, with blind rage and fury, into shreds and tatters.

But I think with each one I tore away something of myself—the old Paula that I should never meet again, nor jest, nor talk to.

The Paula who had learned so much and knew so little.

PART III.

"A Little Laughter and a Little Love."

CHAPTER I.

TO-NIGHT we met again—the three girls who had parted at life's threshold and gone their several ways.

To-night Claire and Lesley and Paula sat by the fire in Lesley's dressing-room—a sad and strange and somewhat silent trio. There, on the wide Chesterfield, lay the bridal robe, and wreath, and veil, that would mean for one of us the greatest, strangest change a woman's life can know, and gazing thoughtfully into the fire that gleamed so cheerily behind its brass fender, sat the girl who would wear that bridal attire.

It was the eve of Lesley's wedding. Claire and I were staying at Stanhope Gate, but after the wedding she was to return to Paris and I to Scarffe.

I think Claire was less changed than either Lesley or myself. She had charming manners, was undoubtedly elegant, if not beautiful, and the little half-foreign tricks of speech and gesture she had acquired gave her a certain attractiveness that was specially noticeable when she was with English girls.

She had been relating her first experiences of a Parisian finishing school, and describing "figure training."

The gradual lacing-in, the stiff "*corsets de nuit*," the manner in which she had been compelled to stand or lie in those instruments of torture for hours, until she was on the verge of fainting. Then the strange, unhealthy fashion of wearing sleeping-gloves laced up to the elbow, and high-heeled boots with pointed toes. The attention paid to her complexion and hair—the whole arduous routine prescribed by fashion for its victims.

"But I have a charming waist," she finished up, as she rose and pressed her hands either side of her slim, *svelte* figure. "Picture to yourself when I went away I measured twenty-four inches, and now I am only eighteen. At my first ball I was quite a success. I have had a real proposal of marriage as I told you, made, of course, through my parents—not to one's face, as in England. I believe they are arranging it. I do not object. He is the Vicomte de Chaumont, and very rich. I shall live in Paris—most of my time. Oh! it is adorable, is Paris, and this winter I shall go everywhere. Be *fiancée* at the end of the season, if I so desire. The Vicomte de Chaumont is enormously rich, my mother says. He has ever so many *châteaux*, and a hotel in the Champs Elysées. I do not know why he wishes to marry me, except that he has a craze for everything English. English sport, English horses, English women. He says an English girl with a French education is the most perfect type of woman in the world."

I looked at her curiously. Of a truth the finishing touches of Paris had produced a wonderful change. Claire's mother was an Englishwoman who had married a wealthy French merchant, and had made her home in Paris.

"But would you really marry a man only because he is rich, and has asked your parents' permission to address you?" I inquired.

"But why not? I should be a simpleton to refuse. A girl is nothing. It is only when you are married that you become of importance. You have an establishment then, and can have a *salon* and play at *grande dame* if you desire. I used to think as we do in England, that a girl must love a man, and he her, before she can even think of marriage. But my people soon showed me that was all wrong. A girl cannot possibly know anything about a man, but her parents can, and they can judge if he is suitable and will make a good husband, and above all give her a good position. Vicomte de Chaumont is of a very great family. He might marry somebody quite as great, but he does not wish. And he is so good, he will wait for my decision, and not hurry me; and the settlements he proposed—mamma said they were princely!"

Still I looked, still I listened; and Lesley, lifting that white narcissus face of hers, looked also, and listened.

"They were a little afraid to let me come here—to England," Claire went on. "But I said I must. We were the three friends of the school. *Tiens!* how far away those days look! You, Lesley, are making a great marriage—and I—I think I shall do the same. And you, Paula—what is it you intend? Do you still take life *au grand sérieux?*"

"I have not distorted my waist," I said, "I have left my complexion alone, and my hands are sun-burnt. I have had one season, and four proposals, and now I am going to see what Lesley and yourself make of marriage!"

She stared at me, and then began to laugh.

"You were always so funny—I think you are funnier than ever. Do you remember what I used to say about you?"

"You used to say a great many things about me."

"I used to think you were always writing a book—mentally—and putting everything and everybody in it. Have you found out any of the things you were so anxious to know? The secrets of love—the hearts of men or women—the real truth of anything?"

"No," I said, quietly, "I haven't discovered a single secret, or the *real* truth of any heart, or nature, or life."

"Then you've only been looking on—as yet."

"As yet," I agreed.

Lesley's eyes met mine. It had been hard to hide from her how unhappy I was; how bitter the taste of my first fruit of knowledge had been to my lips.

"Perhaps," said Claire, "you have not had our opportunities."

She moved across the room and touched the lustrous folds of satin with a reverent hand. "How lovely you will look, Lesley," she said. "I almost envy you."

"The dress?" asked Lesley, "or—the tragedy it symbolizes?"

"Marriage a tragedy—*Quoi donc!* A comedy you mean. It rests with ourselves to make it so."

"A comedy of errors," I suggested.

"You always manage to say horrid things, *chère* Paula! I can't fancy any man falling in love with *you!*"

"We were talking of marriage, not of falling in love."

"*Eh, bien*—tell me"—she dropped the fold of satin and came back—"how is it you have been four times proposed to and yet—are not even a *fiancée*?"

"Because I did not care enough for any of the four to sacrifice a woman's best possession—*independence*."

"Don't tell me, Paula, you have got strong-minded, and want to get on platforms and tell women all the horrid rational things that make them discontented with men, and conceited about themselves!"

"No," I said. "My ambitions don't lie in the direction of platform oratory any more than they tend to marriage. As I said before, I am going to watch the result of an experiment before I attempt it on my own behalf."

She stood lightly swaying on one foot, and examined me critically.

"You ought to be a success," she said presently. "You are very striking-looking. Of course there are men who admire vivid coloring, and men who don't. One never knows what will take. You and Lesley are the greatest possible contrast. But I must say, Paula, since you left school you have much improved."

"I am glad to hear it. Although my waist still measures twenty-two inches."

"Oh, la, la! does it really? You must have a very good dressmaker, for it does not *look* any larger than mine."

"I will tell her so," I answered. "She almost objected to my bridesmaid measurements. They are two inches in excess of what she considers the fashionable standard."

"You have no idea how soon you get used to the compression."

"I don't want to have any idea, or any compression. Tell me some more about French women, Claire. One never seems to know them except *en grande tenue*—shopping, visiting, dining, cycling. What is their home-life like?"

"I really don't know. Except that my mother says they are never fit to be seen in the morning. Always a case of *peignoir*, and curling-pins, and flat-heeled shoes. You see, domestic life in France is very different from ours—especially in the higher ranks of society. Monsieur has his apartments; madame has hers. She visits or receives, or goes where she pleases, without question from him. They have none of our stupid nine o'clock breakfasts. They take their coffee or chocolate in their own room, and meet at the mid-day *déjeuner*—or not. Go their own way, in fact. And as long as they are discreet, and *convenable*, the whole *ménage* conducts itself admirably. That—my mother explains—is why there are so few scandals and quarrels in a French household. We English, she says, are too intimate, too much thrown together, too exacting the one of the other."

"I see. It certainly sounds very sensible."

"Oh, but it is sensible, I assure you. At my home that is how everything goes, and my father is so kind, and so considerate and generous. Why, my mother told me he never questions an account, however extravagant. And her jewels—he is always giving her jewels. Sometimes he has to go away on business to other cities—Lyons, Marseilles, Vienna—even Russia, but he never fails to bring her back a magnificent present. Oh, their marriage

has been a great success, and yet she was only a girl when she made it."

"That is very encouraging for you," I said.

"Certainly it is. But why for me more than for Lesley? She also makes a *mariage de convenance*—is it not, *ma chère*? Of a truth you have shown no enthusiasm either with, or without, the presence of Lord Lynmouth. He is, of course, devoted—that is without doubt. But you——"

Lesley's delicate little face grew a shade whiter.

"I am as happy as I expected," she said. "It was only Paula who asked great things of life. You and I, Claire, will take just what it gives."

"That is true, *ma chère*, and our poor Paula will be asking, and seeking, and criticising, while we are enjoying. That is just the difference."

"Yes," I said. "The difference being your idea of enjoyment, and mine—of life."

Claire seated herself again, and for a moment we were silent.

"I hope," she suddenly said, "that on the eve of my marriage I shall not be so gloomy, so *triste* as you seem, Lesley. I have not once seen you smile, even when you looked at your *rivière* of diamonds and that adorable gown. You ought to be happy! Such a trousseau, such jewels, and such presents—fit for a princess! and yet you are as grave as an owl. I think Paula makes you so. *Moi*, I would have only laughter and joy and merriment about my wedding eve, and should keep my thoughts only to the settlement and the jewels, and the perfect establishment I meant to have, and the season when I would be presented with my new title! Oh, life is the most charming thing when you are young and such a future lies before you!"

"I think you would want trumpeters to herald your future, Claire, and outriders before your carriage, and a general crowd of lookers-on to applaud and envy. You are of the type that signalizes the end of the century. Noise, glitter, show, *éclat* should fill your days, and everything be a pageant! Your chief happiness the outrivaling of a rival, or the out-reaching an extravagance. Your ambition, not how select your *salon* can be, but how crowded. Your heart's desire, not the treasure of one perfect love, but the exciting dalliance with a hundred lovers."

I broke off abruptly. I had not meant to say so much, but two months of garnered misery and hidden shame had left me very bitter. If my ideals had been impossible, at least they had been pure; if my desires had seemed exacting, I was prepared to give the best of myself in exchange.

I knew Lesley's heart, and Claire did not. I felt how her sensitive nature must shrink from all this publicity, from the panoply of outward show, the jewels and satins and gifts so lavishly showered upon an envied bride.

I did not envy her any more than she envied herself.

Claire looked at me, her eyebrows arched in astonishment and a slight flush warming her cheek.

"*Ciel!* but how you talk. What is the harm of a *grand mariage*? If it has to be at all, it is better it should be one that people will envy, not pity. And in one, two, three years it matters so little to yourself whom you have married, but if there be all sorts of compensating advantages, then you can be extremely content, and choose your own path, and be happy your own way."

Lesley made a little impatient movement and glanced at the clock. It pointed to five minutes of midnight. Claire rose languidly. She was in a primrose satin dressing-robe, bordered with white fur, and had not yet removed her corsets.

"We must not tire you, Lesley," she said. "It is just upon midnight. Good-night, *ma bien aimée*; sleep well, and dream of the glories before you. They will never come the way of our dear wise Paula; or if they do—she won't appreciate them."

"I shall appreciate them at their worth," I said. "But the worth of anything in this world is only the value one's own soul puts upon it. Queens and kings have been poor and beggars rich."

"It is such a dear, wise, serious old owl!" laughed Claire, kissing me on either cheek. "But how can one wonder? Figure to yourself a life among old ruins, and dusty books, and a wise old professor for guardian—that is how you showed yourself, Paula, in your letters. That is how I have pictured you. But there—we will talk no more, seeing we have not once agreed: *Bonne nuit, mes chéries*."

She nodded and passed through the archway dividing the two rooms, and we heard the outer door close.

Lesley and I stood silent, avoiding each other's eyes. At the first sound of the striking hour her head drooped, her hands went out to me.

I held them, and I felt them grow colder with each silvery note. At the last she lifted her head and turned and looked at her reflection in the mirror above. Looked so long, so silently, that I could almost feel the force of the thoughts that thronged within her brain; could almost trace in the deep, intent eyes the shadow of those pictures they beheld.

But still she did not speak.

"Claire has altered very much," I said, at last breaking the silence, with a sudden dread of its mysteries.

She started and seemed to come out of her trance. Our eyes met in one quick look.

"We are all altered," she said in a low, restrained voice. "You, Paula, most of all."

"I?—more than yourself, Lesley?"

"It is in recognizing my own change I recognize yours, but we won't talk of it to-night, dear—not now. It would be too sad. They say it is ill-luck to weep on your wedding-day—*day*, Paula; it has come to that. Yesterday has ceased to exist; and very, very soon I shall have ceased to be the girl you have known. Such a little thing will alter it. A form of words, a little ring of gold. I wonder how other girls feel who are making a marriage like mine? For one *must* feel, Paula; one can't help it."

"Lesley," I entreated, "it's not too late, if you're unhappy, afraid——"

She half smiled, but those deep eyes met mine tranquilly still.

"Afraid—I was never that, Paula. But I am ashamed—bitterly, horribly ashamed—and to hide that shame I will go through with it. Do you hear? I—*will*. When you hear me say that to-morrow, Paula——"

I shuddered as if a cold blast had penetrated that warm and perfumed atmosphere.

"We had better say no more if your mind is made up."

"You are thinking of how I shall appear at the ceremony. Have no fear. I possess a very clever maid."

"Don't, Lesley," I entreated. "I hate to hear you talk that society jargon."

The bitterness left her small, curved mouth, and it smiled—a pale, faint shadow of the smile I had once seen there.

Suddenly she raised her hand, and with one finger touched the blue veins beneath her sombre eyes.

"Do you see *that?*" she said softly. "That, Paula, is the only sign I am afraid of. It is the tear channel. The most self-betraying secret of a woman's face. No art can hide, no power disguise it. While you are young it only makes you look interesting. But the years go on, and the faint line is ploughed into a channel and the outline of the cheek is cut as by a sword. Study a woman's face, Paula, and learn by that line of the grief she has borne, and the tears she has shed. You will never believe her smiles then, nor her words that tell you she is—happy."

"Shall I go now, Lesley?" I asked, after another pause.

"Yes, dear. We have said good-by to a great deal; all the foolish fancies and ideals and hopes that were ours a year ago. It isn't much sadder to say good-by to—each other."

"Must we do—that?" I asked, sadly. "Will you be less true to me and our old trust and love after—after to-day?"

"I don't know. I cannot tell."

Her voice lost its calm and grew hurried. "Don't ask me anything to-night, Paula—don't make me think. Oh, my dear, if ever you loved me, don't make me *think*—to-night!"

CHAPTER II.

It was the first wedding I had ever seen as an interested assistant, not a mere spectator.

From first to last the brilliant pageant played itself successfully. Who could know that the admired and admirable centre of it all was not as radiant with happiness as she looked? Who could say that the exquisite flush which mantled her cheek was of art, not nature's painting? Who tell that the hard glitter of the eyes meant the defiance of sternly repressed tears?

She went through it all so bravely that I could only wonder where she had found strength.

From that first whispered "Here she comes" to that last "Good-by" that caught the air with a laugh, and died in an echo of scattered rice and swift-rolling wheels, I had seen only Lesley—my Lesley. Not the sheen of her magnificent dress, the sparkle of her jewels, the haughty poise of the little, queenly head, but Lesley with the moonlight shining on her white face, with despair in her eyes, with clasped hands wrung in agony; Lesley pouring out her heart to me and telling me a history that made to-day's ceremony a hateful mockery.

But she had learned the world's lesson well. Her beauty, her grace, her bearing, her wonderful composure were the theme of everyone's admiration, and I heard Claire murmur that she should treasure the example in her memory for future use, when a few

months later she herself might be transformed into Madame de Chaumont.

The guests had departed, and Lady Archie, worn out, so she declared, had retired for a rest after the reception. I, too, escaped to my own room.

The evening was to end up with a visit to the theatre. I had only just heard of it. All the bridesmaids, Lady Archie and her husband, the Lorely, and a few choice spirits were to be the occupants of a row of circle seats. Stalls had not been procurable. There was such a run on the piece.

I felt very tired, and almost wished I could excuse myself from going, but as the principal bridesmaid I knew it would look affected, or ungracious.

I got out of my finery and threw myself on the bed. My room adjoined Lesley's dressing-room, and through the open door I could see her wedding dress and veil and wreath, as she had left them when changing into her traveling gown.

They fascinated my eyes. Such a little while they had been worn, yet never, never again would that wearer be the girl who had put them on for those few hours of pageantry.

I thought of her on the previous night; of those dark, wide, terrified eyes; of her words — "If you ever loved me don't make me *think* — to-night!"

"But you will *have* to think, Lesley," I said to myself. "No one can escape from themselves always. There is something pursuing you, even now; sitting by your side as you drive on that first stage of your wedding journey. It will catch you up, fly you ever so swiftly; it will haunt you as your words haunt me."

* * * * *

The dim October dusk crept in through the window, and all about was quiet.

I thought of the old room at Scarffe, and the familiar figure in the chair, and wondered if he missed me. This was our tea-hour—the hour we always spent together. The hour when quiet confidences and broken words strove to heal that never-ending pain of mine; strove to teach me the charity of life as well as its high standards; the patience of life as well as its great truths.

At first it had been intolerable to me to speak of that secret. Any allusion was as the pressure of a rough hand on raw flesh.

How tenderly and how skilfully I had been dealt with I only began to learn in these days of absence in this atmosphere of worldly frivolity.

Lesley had recognized a change in me, but guessed nothing of its cause; Claire had summed me up in her light fashion the previous night; Lady Archie had laughingly declared I must have taken an overdose of archæology since my last visit to town; the Lorely's shafts had sped my way disregarded. I had but one dread—that any of these heartless, jesting people should find out what the secret was that had overshadowed my life—lest they should hear *who* and what was the woman tempted by devils of lust and greed, and vanity and desire, from the path of honor and the ties of duty.

When I thought of it, when I remembered how I had idolized that memory, I grew mad with fierce rage and blind with tears of passion. Not once in these months had I learned to regard her with any sense of pity, or excuse her with any recognition of the force temptation might take.

I had written of my feelings over and over again,

but the writing only served to lash them into yet wilder fury, as the impotence of the breaking waves seems to gather fresh force with the swelling tide on which they mount.

"You are very young, Paula," the patient voice had said again and again. "And the young are always unjust and loth to find excuse. Life has much to teach you, ere you can consider mercy before judgment."

* * * * *

Even here, amidst the trappings of wedding finery, the excitement of the day, I could not get away from that memory. Tired brain and aching head lay on the pillow, but to Paula herself came no rest.

"I will go home to-morrow," I said to myself. "I am best at home. Among all these people I only seem to feel more desolate."

* * * * *

I think I fell asleep. I remember starting up at the flash of a light in the room and hearing Claire's voice asking me if I was coming down to dinner.

I soon got into my dress again, and she arranged my hair with a few deft touches.

"It is the most wonderful thing about you, that hair of yours," she said. "I have never seen anything like it. Paula, what sort of men were they that wanted to marry you?"

"How you do harp on that one string!" I cried impatiently. "What does it matter? One was a farmer, one an American doctor" (I did give him his title). "Another was a self-made millionaire, and another you will see to-night. They call him Tommy Dodd. He is the only 'title' I have managed to charm, and he has asked me to marry him twice already."

"And why won't you?"

"Because he is an empty-headed fool!" I said impatiently.

She made one of her expressive, foreign gestures. "*Ciel!* but you are strange. What can that matter if it is a good chance? And a fool makes the safest husband."

"Do not preach your horrid, foreign infidelities to me," I said coldly. "A woman owes a debt to herself. She has no right to forget or forego it. If she cannot love the man to whom she gives herself, she is committing a sin if she marries him."

"That is so prudish—so old-fashioned, my Paula. I wish I had you for a year in Paris. You would soon cease to hold such theories. Why, even Lesley——"

"Don't, please, speak of Lesley," I said hurriedly. "If she has added one more to the mistakes of social vanity, so much the more does she need pity. And she will need it before her life ends."

"You certainly are a crank, Paula. And how you talk! Tell me, have you written a book yet? I always said you would."

I moved across the room for my gloves and began to draw them on. "No," I said, "nor do I intend to."

"Then you still scribble with your mind," she said, laughing.

* * * * *

About me as I write to-night flash the glare and brilliance of a scene to which I suddenly grew deaf and blind.

Was I so ignorant, so stupid, that the talk about me had conveyed nothing of the name of the play or the theatre whither we were driven? Fourteen seats

in the front row of the circle held our party. We created some slight stir as we entered—the six bridesmaids in their dresses of the day, the other guests in evening attire, conspicuous among them being Lady Brancepeth, in diamond shoulder straps and very little else in the way of *corsage*.

We were a little late; the curtain was up. I took the seat indicated, placed my bouquet on the velvet ledge, and then looked at the stage. It was almost dark. Two people occupied it—a man and a woman. The woman had her back turned, but I knew her even before the light flashed on her red-gold hair. I knew the languid grace of that matchless figure, and the voice that reached my ears turned me faint and sick with memories. Only the greatest effort kept me from betraying myself, enabled me to sit still, while about me the rustle of dresses sweeping into place was like the surge of the sea. Waves of sound throbbed in the air, and my ears caught no meaning—the scene went on, and conveyed to me nothing comprehensible. I was thankful for the semi-obscurity around, thankful that no one was observing me. I regained composure before the act was over, and froze into a critical condemnation of the play that was as heartless in its teachings, as immoral in its attitude to life, as plausible, and false, and cruel as the era that had evoked, and the sated, *blasé* audience who applauded it.

It was a relief when some one in the gallery hissed and the pit was coldly silent.

The piece was evidently only suited to the comprehension of the upper classes. I had heard Dickey Wren chuckle delightedly, and the Honorable Tommy Yelverton pronounce it “rippin’.” Lan-

guid occupants of stalls and boxes applauded rapturously.

I felt sorry to think a woman had written the play, and that a woman was acting in it whose own life might have matched its heartless platitudes.

But when they called her back again, and yet again, and she bowed, and smiled, and stood, a living picture of sensuous beauty among the glow of flowers that had been cast at her feet, I met her eyes for the first time. Full and straight across that lighted space we looked; *from face to face*. Again that curious stillness crept over hers as when first we had met, and she had heard my name.

The distance that separated us now was not dark enough to hide the secret that she held, nor wide enough to keep back from her heart the message sent by mine.

I think she knew that I knew her—at last.

CHAPTER III.

It was growing dark when I reached Scarffe Station. I glanced carelessly at the few figures on the platform, and to my surprise saw the professor. I had wired from town that morning that I was coming down, but had never expected he would meet me.

A memory of that other arrival, when I had found myself alone, and apparently forgotten, came over me as I greeted him. In this year we had grown curiously interested in and attached to one another.

"I have a cab for your luggage," he said, as we went out of the station. "You see, Paula, I am waking up to the obligations of every-day life at last."

I gave his arm a little squeeze. "It was good of you to come," I said.

"Not so good as your return. I never expected you could tear yourself away from your gay friends and the pleasures of town so soon. I suppose the wedding was—as—ah—brilliant as you expected?"

"Yes," I said. "Quite."

We got into the musty old cab and jolted along for some time in silence.

The familiar landmarks came and went like ghosts in the falling dusk. I turned to him.

"Do you know," I said, "I believe I am growing fond of Scarffe. When I was away it positively haunted me."

"Any one who feels or thinks deeply," he said, "cannot help becoming attached to—ah—places that possess interest and beauty. Modern life is doing its best to destroy both; its touch is a scourge. But we have averted it here as yet. Not for long, I fear. But to me this place is one of the few that possesses tranquillity, historic interest, and—ah—mediæval charm. I have worked without fear of intrusion, and made—ah—researches without interruption. I too am attached to the place. I shall be sorry to leave it."

"Why should you leave it?" I asked quickly.

"When my book is finished," he answered, "there will be no need to remain. And it is a dull life for youth, Paula."

"My youth can flourish very well here," I said. "Life is better and—safer, too—than in the world."

"Life," he said, "has not brought you what it should bring to youth, or you would not say that."

I made no answer, and we drove on.

It seemed to me such a long, long time since I had driven here by Adam Herivale's side, the cold December moon shining through rifts of clouds, the rain falling mistily over the dark, ploughed fields.

Yet it was only a time to be counted by months, so rapidly does the education of life proceed. But in those months I had received harm and done harm. I had known what it was to be proud and self-satisfied; assured of my own importance, and vain of the interest I aroused. Sharp and sudden had been my humiliation, painful the truths I had learned. One by one I had seen my foolish conceits rent to pieces, one by one I had seen my faiths fall.

I turned with a sudden fear of yet further trial and clasped the old, wrinkled hand by my side. "You

must not go away from here," I said. "And you must let me stay with you. It is the best place for me—the very best."

"For a little while," he said, "perhaps it is."

"I have got into bad habits," I hurried on. "I may get into worse; and I don't want to. There is something better than jesting and laughing, and taking life only from a sense of enjoyment; the enjoyment it offers."

"You are right, Paula," he said, "though enjoyment is one of youth's happiest phases; but it is short-lived—you must have something to fall back upon."

"That is what I want," I said. "And only you can give it me."

"My dear child—I?"

"Yes—and you give it all the more successfully because you are unconscious of giving it. You have a very exalted way of looking at things. I—I have not. But I think if you let me stay by you, and try to look at life as you do, it will be better for me. You told me I must see the world, and I am sure you thought I should find it pleasant and enjoy it; but when I look back on those frivolous months I know they were only harming me. What I learned, what I heard, what I saw, was not good—never!"

"You learned quickly, my dear," he said gravely.

"Because I can't help it. Because I *must* think. I can speak to you and tell you, because I feel you will understand; you won't laugh. There, in the world I have left, everyone laughs at the serious things. Even death doesn't seem to strike them in any other light than what is the most becoming style of mourning. Perhaps those women, when they were young, felt as I do, but pure feelings and

noble ambitions are soon killed by mockery or disuse. And after a time one cannot alter life. It is like a great, strong wave that is made up of the force of hundreds of other waves, and it carries us along to some shore where all the others are going. I don't want to be carried along. My life belongs to myself as yet. Oh, keep it by you, and with you!"

He gave my hand a gentle pressure. His voice was not as firm as usual as he answered that impassioned outburst.

"It is what I should desire," he said. "But I fear to seem selfish. When you were away I missed you so—the tea, the little talks, the quiet, happy hours, the music. But I always said I must not expect a sacrifice from—from *you*, Paula."

"A sacrifice from me," I said, "would be as impossible, dear professor, as selfishness on your part. Oh, here we are at home. I am glad. I am very, very glad!"

The lights shone on his face, and in the quiet content of his dim, blue eyes.

"You make me very happy, my dear," he said, "when you say that."

* * * * *

My old room—so plain and simple after the luxurious appointments of Stanhope Gate. The blazing fire to greet me, the laughing face of Merrieless to give me welcome. How pleasant and homely it all was!

And once again I thought of that first homecoming as an emancipated schoolgirl. Of the thoughts I had brought here, and the discontent of my heart, and my crude, unworthy summary of the

dear, wise old man whom I had learned to love and appreciate as well. Yet even as I stood before the welcoming blaze and gazed into its deep, red heart, I was taking myself to task for some insincerity lurking in the background of changed feelings. I *knew* they were less genuine than they seemed. Born of pique, not penitence; disgust, not judgment. Born most of all of that self-pity which is so natural to youth, so easily excited by the spectacle of its own undeserved sufferings.

"If I could only be sure that I was *genuine* in one single thought or feeling, even in the way I regard my real self," I thought bitterly. "But when I look back on the impulse that made me speak as I did, I feel more gratified by the look in that dear old face than certain that I deserve credit for bringing it there. Am I ever to find out if I am really Paula, or playing the part of the Paula I want other people to believe in?"

I sighed wearily. It was getting very complicated and I was getting tired of both Paulas—the false and the true.

But I suppose I took them both downstairs and wove them into the music I played, and the words I said, and the patience with which I listened to extracts from the book now nearing completion—the book whose compiling and research had cost such labor and time and thought to its patient author.

"It has tired you, hasn't it?" I asked him, as he put the sheets of beautiful, neat penmanship aside.

"Work always tires one more or less, my dear," he said. "But if it is work done to the best of our ability, then it is worthy of satisfaction."

"Do you remember my asking you once if a writer

puts real feelings, real expressions into his work? If the thoughts represent his own thoughts uttered by his creations?"

"I remember. And I believe I told you it was not necessary to believe all you wrote, or individualize it. In the course of literary or artistic life one gains a wide experience, which one naturally turns to profit by using as material. But in the—the creation of a character, I should say the author must conceive it clearly as flesh and blood, and human, before clothing it with words and placing it on a stage of action. No story can seem true to a reader if it has not first been true to the author of it. I am not a wide reader of fiction. Standard works I have of course studied, and a few modern novels that have been widely praised. But I find modern writers apt to lose sight of the—ah—importance of what they publish. Perhaps, for them, it has no importance. That is the grave fault and the crying disgrace of modern literature. It makes it slipshod, imperfect, inaccurate. You may argue that since fiction is only to amuse, these defects are unimportant. But nothing is unimportant that goes out from one mind and soul with a message to another. Harm may and does accrue. To me it seems as wrong to give a false view of life, a false code of honor, to gloss over vice, or mock at one single, deep, or holy emotion, as to rob, or betray, or murder! There are no arbitrary rules for literature. It is a pity there are not. The ranks might be cleared and freed from that worthless flood of competition which is the ruin of all good work."

He spoke warmly and with interest. I listened with that never-satisfied query in my mind as to the amount of genuine feeling brought to bear on that

particular book whose false philosophies I had once adored.

"I wanted to tell you—something," I said at last. "It is about an incident that happened when I was in town."

"Yes?" he said, looking down at my face, as I sat on my usual low stool beside his chair.

"On the night of Lesley's wedding we all went to the theatre," I said. "I had not asked what theatre, or the piece. When I looked at the stage I saw—her again."

"Poor child," he said softly, and his hand stroked my hair as it lay against his knee. "I thought she had left—gone back to America."

"No. It was a hateful piece, and she acted as if she wanted to paint the woman in all her vileness and selfishness. And the people seemed to like it. They called her back again and again. It was at the last, just as she bowed and smiled, that she saw me and—I cannot get over the idea she felt I *knew*."

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh, I don't know. One *feels* a thing sometimes without being able to explain why. That is all I can say."

"Was this—the reason you hurried back so quickly, Paula?"

"Partly—and partly because Lesley's marriage affected me so. It was such a pure piece of worldliness and outward show. She looked like a dream of purity and loveliness, and yet——"

My voice broke. I remembered that piteous entreaty not to make her *think* on her wedding eve. My poor, pretty Lesley!

"Do you fear she will not be happy?" he asked presently.

"I am sure she will not."

"She is your friend," he said slowly. "You would have had girlish confidences. I suppose you know—why?"

"Yes," I said, "I know why. And knowing it, and looking on at those people applauding and encouraging the sacrifice, looking at other husbands and wives, and the mockery and woe of marriage, made me feel suddenly so tired, so ashamed, so sick of that false life, that I only longed to get away to where peace and goodness lay."

"My dear," he said, "I thank you for that thought."

"I have had other thoughts—so many, and so wicked. I get so perplexed."

"Ah, my child—I know that perpetual question, that perplexity of youth. You have been trying to find yourself, Paula, and perhaps you did not set about it in—in quite the right way."

"I am very sure I did not."

"There are strange things in the heart of youth," he went on dreamily. "And its dreams are very beautiful. But life is no place for dreams—only the poet and the thinker can afford to live away from the world, and live for its well-being. To the most of us life is an urgent call or a plain duty. It has to be obeyed. I think sometimes, Paula, that it was because you had no special call, saw no absolute duty awaiting you that you made life a complex instead of a simple thing. I have often thought—I did not like to recall what was so painful—but I have often thought of what you said once about writing things down. That it made them seem more real. Is this a habit of yours, my dear?"

"It used to be. I gave it up after—that hateful

night. But it is always tempting me again. Everything *lives* for me, like a scene, or a story. My mind is restless until it places events into some shape or form. Can you explain why this is?"

He was silent so long that I thought he could not have heard me. But the gentle touch of the hand went on, and I waited.

"Paula," he said at last, "you are asking the same question that—she—asked. Can you not, by the light of your own nature, read something of the restlessness and fever and desire that drove her to seek distraction? She has found it, and success and fame, too. But perhaps her heart is still a woman's heart, full of deep, strange phases; desperately sad, and desperately — afraid. You have come to me, Paula, to tell me what hurts you. Had she done the same——"

"Do you think you could have saved her?"

"I should have tried my best. She was young and ignorant and thoughtless. The world tempted her. She had, perhaps, less resolution than you—or she relied upon her own judgment. But if you reflect, Paula, you can trace back the origin of your own restlessness and dissatisfaction, your own perpetual search for some outlet of imprisoned feelings. She played with human hearts as a child plays with toys. At first life was a jest. Do you think, Paula, it is *that* any longer? That she has not dark and bitter hours, haunted by shame and terrible memories? Perhaps, some day, she will creep back broken-hearted to us. Yes—us, my dear—the man who loved her faithfully—the child she deserted."

Something in his voice, in the innocent simplicity of that self-betrayal, touched me as nothing had touched me yet. I felt the tears gather and drop on

the wrinkled hand I held, and I felt, too, the momentary pause of the one that stroked my hair.

But the thought in my heart—the thought I could not express—was that I might have become like her but for that self-betrayal—but for that wise and simple life, about me like an unasked yet faithful protection.

A protection at which I had once scoffed.

CHAPTER IV.

I DROPPED back into the old, peaceful routine of days, the old, simple duties of life, with something of the satisfaction a tired swimmer feels who has reached land after an unexpected demand on his energies.

It was pleasant to hear Merrieless' homely chatter, and even the proverbs of Graddage had a salutary sharpness in their reproach, or reproof. Nothing disturbed those first few days. No letters, no calls, no intrusion of the outer world. I rested body and mind. I read a great deal. I had long, quiet talks with the professor—talks that did me good, even if they could not cure that morbid dissatisfaction with myself and my part in life that at times swept over me like a wave of misery.

One afternoon I went over to Woodcote to see Mrs. Herivale. I found her very frail and weak, but placid and sweet as ever. She told me Adam had gone away for a time, but gave no reason, or locality, and I did not like to ask for either. She made me have tea with her in the cosy old parlor, and the cheerful talk of the farmer and the girls brought with it that sense of family union and content I had failed to discover in more brilliant family circles.

How they loved that pale, gentle woman, studied her every want, listened to her quiet words!

When they left us alone, as they always did, she

asked me of Lesley and the wedding, and I told her briefly how gay and bright a pageant it had seemed.

"If that were all," she sighed, "the sweet young lady might be happy. But the life that *begins* for a woman when she steps out of church door by her husband's side, that, Miss Paula, is another sort o' life to any that's gone before. There was something in Miss Lesley's face that spoke o' suffering. And you say she had no mother's counsel to guide her?"

"No," I said, very low, wondering if there were mothers in Society, in whose counsel a girl might trust before she faced moral shipwreck. "But, after all, no counsel can help you. When you take up a responsibility you must go through with it."

She looked at me with her wise, sweet eyes.

"Ah, my dear," she said, "those young lips o' yours ought to speak brighter words. There should be nought in life as yet to make you feel discontented with it—and it's an unwise thing to give way to. Sometimes you talk very clever and very pretty, but it doesn't seem to me as if your words were *real*; not as if your heart was in them. Don't encourage fancies, Miss Paula. Look at life straight and clear, and take its duties as they come. 'Tis easier to face the great parting knowing you've done that. Believe an old woman, my dear, who's seen more o' life than you, even if it's a different sort o' life. There's but one true law for women, and it's none o' man's making. It's just—content. Content with her own nature as Nature made it—her own soul as God gave it. No repining because things can't be altered to whims (for we all have our whimsies, Miss Paula, bein' women), no regrets

that she isn't better and wiser than God meant her to be. He gave her to man, and man's she is; to have and to hold, to love and help and guide; or else she ceases to be—woman."

Deep into my rebellious heart sank the simple wisdom of those words. I went home, as I always went home from Woodcote, the better for what I had heard and seen.

When I played to my ever-willing listener that night I chose brighter music than for long I had chosen—quaint gavottes, stirring battle marches, the rippling, laughing measure of Chopin's gayest waltzes. It pleased me to see how attentively he listened, how the studious face brightened, and how now and then the white head nodded time to some spirited phrase that caught his ear and pleased it.

When I stopped and went over to his chair he held out his hand.

"Thank you, my dear. I like that music. It was the music of youth—the music you ought to play. I fancied I could see you dancing. You dance, do you not, Paula?"

"Oh, yes, of course I do. I should have cut a sorry figure in London ballrooms but for that."

"And you liked it? You felt gay and bright. It meant enjoyment."

"Enjoyment of a sensation — yes. But, unfortunately, professor, one cannot dance alone."

"No," he said vaguely. "No, Paula, I—I suppose not—in a ballroom. But your partners—were they satisfactory?"

"As far as time and style—certainly. But they seemed to dance in much the same spirit they did everything—a bore, an obligation, a means for an end. There would be two rounds, sometimes only

one, a few vapid remarks, and then a suggestion of a conservatory, or a balcony."

"None of those partners pleased you?" he asked.

"No, except for the time they served as partners."

"You are a very difficult girl to please, or—a very easy one. You would need either a hero or a very simple, honest man, whose only merit was that he loved you above and beyond all other women—and would so love you to life's end."

"As for the hero," I said, "I should like to see a hero through the eyes of those who live behind the scenes of his heroism. I might then get some idea of the *man*."

"The man"—he smiled up at me. "You think that behind the scenes would show him only as a very ordinary person."

"From the point of view," I said, "of sister or mother."

"Ah, Paula," he said sadly, "they would only see him through a haze of sentiment. The sister would have prophesied strength from a broken doll she had cherished. The mother—what is the greatest warrior in the world to the mother who bore him, save the little lad who sat at her knee, and knew that 's' stood for soldier?"

"Well, take the 'simple, honest man,' " I went on inexorably. "Should I appreciate his love?—life-long fidelity is an irresistible appeal to a woman's vanity, but I fear—I very much fear—that I should not value the love unless I could return it equally."

"And why should you not?" he asked.

"Ah, that's the question. It doesn't seem *in* me to care for any one man. I've seen plenty—I've read of them and heard of them, and yet—they don't appeal in any way to anything within myself."

"Ah, my child, that is at once characteristic and your defect. You won't accept anything for what it seems. You want to find out what it *is*. But you never can, Paula. The hidden springs that work our highest emotions, the noblest impulses that force us into action, these are not things to be explained to cold criticism. Thought is God's most priceless gift, but who can tell us *why* we think a certain thing — why our emotions spring into the vivid force of passionate words? No one. We only feel that it is so. Once you *feel*, Paula, you will forget to reason, and then you will have learnt the woman's lesson."

"I will tell you," I said suddenly, "what I *do* feel, and that is that I'm never true. That in all phases of emotion I'm not *myself*, but merely looking on at myself; suffering, or forgiving, or acting the part I want to make *real*."

"My dear," he said, "I'm sorry for you. In looking out for Truth you have missed the way. You have put the seeker before the search. Are none of your emotions true, Paula? Do you pretend—even to me?"

I hung my head abashed and shamed.

"At first," I said, "I did pretend. I wanted to be a sort of ministering angel. It seemed to me that as my place was here I must make myself of some importance in that place. I didn't want to be overlooked even by you."

"At first—you said at *first*, Paula? Don't fear to trust me with the truth. Have your feelings changed? Can I not believe that some genuine affection lives in your heart for a lonely, old man whose life you have gladdened?"

"Oh, yes—yes, indeed!" I cried eagerly. "I have

changed in that way. To you I am what I am. I *wanted* to come back to you, and I want to stay with you, because I feel you are the one person who does me good, who draws out this hateful egotism."

"One thing will cure you, Paula," he said gently. "Not Society, not the gay life of the world to which I sent you. A sorrow—deep and real. Something that will make you *forget* that you are only an on-looker. Something that will wrench from your brain all its cold and critical faculties; that will waken your heart to feel the woe of life, and make you truly grateful if that life holds a little child's laugh . . . a man's true love."

I was silent.

I knew that to-day I had heard the deep and simple truth of life from two sources.

The one—an ailing woman, around whom was centred the home-worship she had so well deserved; the other—this lonely, old man, so wise and yet so simple of heart, who had silently suffered and borne without complaint a loveless fate.

My headstrong course was checked suddenly. I felt as if I had strolled carelessly to the brink of a precipice, and a hand had pulled me back. Only those whose nerves are tried and strong may look over that brink, otherwise the brain would reel and the head grow dizzy, and then would come the fall that means destruction.

* * * * *

That silence lasted long. But I seemed to know he was following my thoughts along that line to which his words had given the cue.

When they ended in a deep-drawn sigh, he looked up to where I stood leaning against the mantelpiece.

"All this time, Paula," he said, "I have forgotten

to mention an important communication that I have received from Lady St. Quinton."

He drew out a letter from his pocket and opened it, and surveyed the sheet with critical eyes.

"She tells me," he went on, "that you have received an offer of marriage from a certain Honorable Thomas Yelverton—a man well connected, rich, and devoted to you. In fact, so devoted that he appeals to her to try and make you alter your determination. He has, I gather, already proposed to you."

"Twice," I said briefly.

"What is your objection to him, Paula?"

I looked down at the foot resting on the fender-bar, and ran over in my own mind a list of objections that finally resolved themselves into one.

"I do not care for him in the way a woman should care for the man she intends to marry."

He replaced the letter in its envelope.

"I am afraid," he said, "I am but a poor sort of guardian for a girl of your type, Paula. In a question of marriage a girl's best and wisest adviser——"

He stopped — his face grew ashen gray. I felt that quiver of emotion that passed over it answered by my own.

"Is one of her own sex," he hurried on. "Lady St. Quinton is very fond of you, Paula. She is desirous to see you well and happily married. She tells me of the admiration and—ah—attentions you received, and she begs me to use my influence with you in this matter. She—ah—urges that too much stress must not be laid upon the absence of love in a suitable marriage. A great deal of happiness can be gained from the comforts and luxuries of life,

the sympathy of a man's heart as well as its devotion."

I laughed unrestrainedly. To hear of Tommy Dodd's "sympathy" with any single wish or feeling of Paula as I knew Paula, was as amusing as to hear the dear professor laboring through Lady St. Quinton's well-worn arguments in his favor.

"You don't appear to take this very seriously, Paula," he said.

"Indeed no. I cannot. He is such a very odd young man. The idea of marrying him is impossible."

"Have you weighed all the advantages, Paula?"

"Yes, and all the disadvantages. The scales don't balance."

"Perhaps you have never been in a position to judge his qualifications. Lady St. Quinton suggests your staying a week or two at the Court. He will be there next week. You will have a better opportunity——"

I shook my head. "I have had plenty of opportunities. I have seen as much of this gentleman as I wish to see."

Then I turned suddenly to him. "Are you so anxious to get rid of me, that you wish me to marry?"

"My dear," he said, "you know better than to ask that. But I must do my duty to you. I am an old man, Paula; I may not live many years. I cannot leave more than a moderate provision for you, and I have no relative to whose care I could leave you. These are considerations that must be faced. If I could see you well and suitably married it would mean a great anxiety lessened."

"But you do not refuse me freedom of choice?"

"Certainly not. I wish you to judge for yourself. You have mixed with society—the best—so Lady St. Quinton assures me. You have known men's admiration—more, their attachment. I think—I suppose, at least, that your chaperon would have explained to you a woman's position in the world who is left unprovided for. It is a very hard one sometimes, Paula, and with all your independence and your gifts you might not find it pleasant. Your present opportunities are far greater than fall to most girls of your age and social standing. The world and I have had very little to do with one another. I preferred a solitary life, but that cannot be your fate; it would not be right or wise."

"It would be better," I said, "than a loveless marriage, an empty heart—or the sins and shams that I have witnessed, thinly veiled by the hypocrisies of society!"

He pushed up his glasses, and looked at me with strange, bewildered eyes.

"Paula," he said, "what am I to do with you?"

"Let me stay here!" I cried suddenly. "Here with you, here where all is peace and content. Here where I need not vex myself with life's problems, where I may learn something that will help me and do me good."

"Will that be best, I wonder?" he said, and the puzzled look in the kind old face was very piteous. "It is the *best* I want to do for you, Paula—only the best. But the quiet, the dull, monotonous days? You forget how dreary it was when you first came?"

"I do forget," I said, "that it was ever dreary. Don't punish me by bringing up the discontented, ungrateful girl who came to you a year ago."

"It will soon be a year," he said, with the air of one making a discovery. "Shall we renew the experiment then, Paula, for another one?"

"For as many as you care to put up with me," I said.

He rose and took my hands, and held them closely.

"I think we are getting to understand one another better. Still, my dear, if you would go to the Court for one week, before you quite decide."

"If I come back an engaged young woman and tell you to prepare for a wedding it will be entirely your own fault," I said, laughing. "You are driving me away."

CHAPTER V.

"MERRIELESS," I said that night as I went up to my room, "open that box ottoman and get out my evening frocks for inspection. I am going to make a splash before I settle down into a quiet life."

"Quiet and you, miss," she observed, "don't seem the sort o' companions as 'ud run together. But I'm glad you're to have the wearin' o' some o' those beautiful frocks. I'd like to ha' seen you in London, miss, among all them grand folk—and at the weddin' most o' all."

She began taking out dress after dress. Lady St. Quinton had supplied me well, and some of them were almost as fresh as at their first wearing.

"Your fancy leans to white, miss," observed my handmaiden. "Not but what this blush-rose is heavenly."

"There's a gold tissuey thing somewhere," I said. "It is almost the color of my hair. It was a most audacious choice, and won me a proposal of marriage. I am to meet the same gentleman again, Merry, so put that aside as one of my selection."

"You must look a sort o' fairy queen, miss," she said, shaking out the lovely fabric, which was one of my successes. "And are you going to marry the gentleman, if I may make so bold, miss?"

"I think—not," I answered.

She paused; the gown hanging from her outstretched hands. "Not—but if that be so, miss,

doesn't it seem kind o' cruel to make yourself so beautiful that his heart will only ache unsatisfied? That's how it do seem to me."

I sat down on the chair before the fire and watched her face with some curiosity. "That's how it would seem to you?" I repeated.

"Yes, miss—and if you go a-jilting one man after another——"

I sprang up in a sudden rage.

"How dare you use that hateful word! I do *not* jilt men. I don't even encourage them!"

She looked so scared that I sat down again, half inclined to laugh.

"Put the thing away," I said decisively. "I'll take the three white ones. That's all. There's not a memory among them, so I suppose I'm safe?"

"The satin, miss?" she inquired. "The first dress that you wore when you went to the Court?"

"Is *that*—there?" I asked slowly.

"You left it behind when you went to London, miss, and Aunt Graddy and I we did take the liberty of turning up the hem so as to freshen it; and she did up the lace beautiful. She's grand at lace, is aunt. 'Tis most as good as the night you put it on, miss."

The night I put it on!

I turned away and looked into the fire. How it all came back! My trying on the dress, and running down to show myself to the professor and Adam Herivale——

"Yes, I'll take that," I said. "Merry, have you heard why young Herivale left the farm?"

"Gregory, he do say that he was mortal changed, miss. That restless and captious in his temper—and forever studyin' when he wasn't workin'. He

seemed to think as how one o' they grand ladies stayin' at the Court, time Miss Lesley was here and the play-actin' goin' on, upset his mind a bit. She took a deal o' notice o' him, in a sly kind o' way. It's said by some as how she's got him to some place o' business in London. Sort o' shamed him wi' farming."

I felt myself growing hot and cold by turns. She had turned her back, and was shaking out the folds of the satin dress; the dress that he had seen me in that night. I thought of his look, his calm, steadfast face, his patience with my manifold whims, his words as we walked in the moonlight under the shadow of the castle ruins.

What did this change mean? Ashamed of his farm—of his heritage—of the soil. Deserting the roof that had sheltered ancestors, leaving the quiet, country peace and the simple, honest home life for the strife of a city, the life of the traders he had so despised.

It seemed horrible to me. I could not fit him into such a place—and yet how well I remembered the powers of the temptress who might have worked this change. How like a flash, that day on the ice came back to me, and her wiles and flatteries; and yet again, when he had been at the Court theatricals—and once more on that night when the grounds had been turned into an open-air auditorium, and far and near the country-side had been represented—in each and all of these scenes had I not witnessed the attraction he possessed for this woman? Why did she dislike me? why did she never lose an opportunity to gibe and jest at "Colin" and myself?

The reason seemed plain enough!

The lessons I had learned bore sudden fruit—

fruit of disgust, and suspicion, and shame. It mattered nothing to me, I told myself; nothing whatever.

I had professed no faith in man or woman. I had no exalted ideal of either. I could not reasonably expect that Adam Herivale would worship at my shrine when I had so plainly shown that his worship was undesired, and the shrine a very unworthy one.

But it hurt me to think him less true of heart than he had vowed to be. Hurt me to think of three words written in the pages of my discarded journal—words meaningless now and falsified.

* * * * *

Merrieless had babbled on, and I had made vague answers, and given all sorts of contradictory opinions about my gowns and the packing.

Finally I dismissed her, and for long sat by the fire brooding, thinking, questioning. I had heard how swiftly men can turn from love to fascination, from rejected affection to the salve for wounded vanity supplied by an easy conquest. But I had not thought Adam Herivale was this sort of man. I had ranked him higher than the others.

It seemed the irony of fate that the one man I *had* esteemed, I had believed in, was the one who dealt the first blow at my faith. His mother's silence on the subject of his absence bore a new meaning for me now, as did the new sorrow in her gentle face, and the decay of strength so plainly visible. Some grief had come to her. Who but Adam could have dealt it? Some secret preyed at her heart. Who but Adam had given her it to bear?

Yet why did I concern myself in the matter? Why should it trouble me? Adam Herivale was

no more to me than any of the others. No more than Captain Conway; no more than "Mark Christopher Q.," as I always called him; no more than Tommy Yelverton, who was asking me to marry him for the third time.

Yet as I set them all in array, looking at each as a mental photograph, something strange and sad stirred my heart. The quiet, patient face, the deep eyes, whose reproach I had seen without ever relenting, stood out clearly from the others, and vexed me with its recognized change.

"*At your service,*" he had said, and I had smiled, and told myself there would never be need of his service, or himself. Yet now, if both were gone, or if I saw them unworthily bestowed!—— Well, what then, Paula?

* * * * *

This morning a letter came to me from Lesley—her first since her marriage. It was very brief, so brief that I turned as if for explanation to a little newspaper cutting enclosed. It was in French. I translated it as I read.

"On the 27th inst., at Yarosla, Novgorod, Russia, Nadia Fedorovna, wife of Paul Fedor, Count Zavadoff, aged twenty-seven years."

Written across in ink were three words—"I am free."

I felt puzzled. Then, bit by bit, I put the story together. Lesley's story—Lesley's marriage. The Russian count of whom she had told me. Free!—that meant this Nadia Fedorovna was his wife.

Dead, and Lesley had married! I snatched up the little scrap of paper and looked at the date. October 27th. Her wedding had taken place October 26th. One day too late!

The horrible, stupid irony of it thrilled me to my heart's core with a blind and stupid rage. What pawns we were upon Life's chessboard! What helpless, silly fools, that Fate played with as it chose!

Nothing had so stirred and moved me as this simple incident—an incident that might wreck two lives—that a few hours would have altered so completely!

Those words—"I am free"—the haste with which the paper had been dispatched, all spoke of memory and sincerity on his part. The news must have reached him suddenly. He had published the death, sent it and that message to Lesley, and it had reached her on—her wedding journey.

November was already a week old, and she and her husband were at Florence.

Again I read the letter. But it was curt almost to insignificance. Merely saying she was well, that Florence was very full of English people, that they would probably go on to Rome for the winter season. She did not sign her new name. And there was a P. S., like an after-thought:

"You have often spoken of the irony of Fate. Read *this*."

I locked away the letter and the slip of paper. I longed to pour my whole soul out to her in response. But something stayed me. Something counseled no disturbance of that frozen calm she must have gathered about her, and though I seemed to wait on a hidden tragedy I feared to draw aside the curtain by so much as an inch.

* * * * *

A few hours later I was on my way to the Court. Through the dusk I saw the lights in the old

farm-house, and heard the feet of laborers going their several ways. I peered forward eagerly. I wanted some news, and I dared not call at Woodcote myself, for fear of what I might, or might *not* hear.

An alert, brisk figure crossing the main road stopped to look at the carriage with bucolic curiosity. The lamps flashed on young Gregory's face. I called the coachman to stop, and leaned out of the window.

"How is Mrs. Herivale?" I asked quickly.

He came forward, touching his hat. "But poorly, miss," he answered. "They called doctor in to-day. You see 'twas a bit o' a shock hearin' sudden like o' Mister Adam's illness."

"Mr. Adam—is he ill?"

"Way up in London town, miss, somewheres. Took bad wi' one o' them fevers as they breeds there. Gone to hospital, so 'twas said in the letter. The missus she be terrible upset by it, and would have th' ould master go straight off to see 'im; but he doan't like leavin' her, and doctor he do say there be no manner o' use in it for 'tis a main bad fever as have to rout out a man's constitution for six weeks or thereabouts. A Latin name don't make it any th' easier to bear, miss, but it's a sound like *ti-pus*, I heerd."

I had listened mechanically, feeling my heart grow heavier with each word. Could it be typhus fever the man meant? A terrible and dangerous one I knew. And Adam—that picture of manly strength, and youth, and healthfulness attacked by it.

"Tell the coachman to drive to the farm," I said hurriedly; "I must see Mrs. Herivale."

CHAPTER VI.

I HAD never felt the sharpness of contrast so keenly as when from the homely bedroom at Woodcote, and the quiet figure lying so patient, and yet so mind-tortured on its pillows, I stepped into the brilliantly lit hall of the Court.

It had to be. I had to do it. I had only a visitor's right at the farm. I could not intrude upon grief so sacred, and whose results already looked tragical. The weak mother stricken down by that sudden blow; the blanched cheek and anxious eyes of the strong old farmer; the sorrowful faces of the girls—these told me a tale of saddest meaning, these meant for me the first face-to-face meeting with grief and sickness, and that chill possibility beyond.

And I left them to hear the Lorely's pert insolences, and "Tommy Dodd's" vapid greeting of "Too awfully glad to see you, don't you know," and all the chatter and laughter and worldly banalities that in the last half hour had become to me like things of another world.

I sat by Lady St. Quinton and accepted tea mechanically, and let my eyes rove over these now familiar faces with a last endeavor to find one real or true sentiment expressed in any of them.

What mattered that their talk was clever, their wit sharp and cynical as of old? What pleasure did I find to-night in elegant phrases, or worldly theories, or the comforting doctrines of self-culture? What satisfaction could the world of fashion give to

that heart-broken mother? What could it speak of hope or sympathy to any desolate or pain-racked soul? What had it made of life but a false craze for excitement, or an intellectual dissipation that deceived no real thinker, but was an admirable destroyer of sentiment?

"What is the matter with you, Paula?" asked Lady St. Quinton, tapping my arm. "I've asked you the same question three times and you've only been staring stupidly at the end of the room as if you saw a ghost."

"I beg your pardon," I said hurriedly; "I was thinking——"

"My dear child——"

"Oh, I know, I know," I said bitterly. "It's bad form, bad manners—all that. But I can't help it to-night. I have seen, heard things that make me think. One can't always look at life as a jest, Lady St. Quinton."

She regarded me with some perturbation.

"You are really such a very odd girl, Paula. One never knows how to take you. I was about to tell you that I had a long letter from Lady Archie this morning, and that she said our pretty bride was so well and happy, and making quite a sensation in Florence. So many people in their set are wintering there, and Lesley is *so* admired. I was asking if you had heard from her yet?"

I thought of that brief note, the little printed slip; the three words whose message of hope could not heal a broken heart.

"Yes—I heard also to-day," I said.

"Of course she would confide a great deal more to you, you were such friends. Did she say much about Florence?"

"Very little about Florence," I answered.

"No doubt—personalities, of course. But she is very happy, isn't she?"

"She is just as happy," I said, "as such a marriage would make any girl."

She gave me a quick look — then bent a little nearer. "You must be kind to him, Paula. Poor fellow, he is quite desperate. His eyes were never off the clock till you came."

I looked in the direction of my persevering suitor.

"I told him," she went on confidentially, "that if you came here it would certainly show you meant to accept him *this* time. That I had put it in that way to you and he must judge for himself. That's why he was so anxious."

"Oh!" I said somewhat vaguely. My wits were wandering again. How bright and cold was that laugh of the Lorely's; did she know——

"I do wish, my dear, you would pay some attention to me," Lady St. Quinton went on pettishly. "I can't imagine what is the matter with you. You're not ill?"

"No—I am perfectly well. Lady St. Quinton, have you ever had typhus fever?"

"Good heavens, child! What a question. No—of course not; what makes you ask?"

"I wanted to know if it's—dangerous?"

"Dangerous! Why, it's deadly—a terrible fever—one of the very worst."

Further and further her voice seemed to recede, further and further into some hazy distance faded those forms and faces of the gay group beyond. A sound like the rushing of waters thundered through my ears. I seemed to fall suddenly into a black gulf.

* * * * *

The voices were still buzzing when I opened my eyes again. Lady St. Quinton was holding smelling-salts to my nostrils, and fanning me. I was still in my chair; she, by standing up, screened me from the rest of the room.

"It was the heat, I suppose," she said; "the change after the frosty air. You turned a little faint."

Her face and voice betrayed anxiety. It would be unpleasant to have Paula as an invalid guest, I thought, translating that anxiety as rapidly as I recovered my senses.

"It is very hot," I said. "If you don't mind, I will go to my room and rest till dinner-time."

"But do you feel all right? No headache, or chill, or anything of that sort?"

"Quite right. Only tired. Let me slip away through the *portières*. No one will notice."

* * * * *

Ah, Paula! Paula! is this you? Sick at heart, tired, miserable, racked with anxiety. With feverish, throbbing temples, and one endless, futile longing to hear the news of that fight going on in a city that seems whole worlds away! A telegram every hour would scarcely satisfy you, and yet you cannot hear news once in the twenty-four.

All to-night I had felt like a caged animal that longed to spring on its captors, but was withheld by bolts and bars. My bolts and bars were of conventional forging, but I had dashed myself against them in thought a hundred times. Now at last, as I locked my door and ruthlessly tore off satin and lace, and the flowers the maid had pinned into my bodice, I felt as if the pent-up feelings of the day would suffocate me!

I threw myself on the bed and burst into a passion of wild sobs. They seemed to tear my very heart-strings, to agonize my throbbing throat and scorch my eyes—yet they brought no relief; they eased nothing of the pain within; the strange, hateful, cruel pain that a single word had brought to life; the pain I could not name even to myself.

All that evening I had borne it—all that night when my heart had been sick with terror and anxiety; all the time while I had joined in the frivolous talk and danced with heedless feet, and listened with dulled ears to the personalities and trivialities that make up Society chatter.

Now, when I was alone at last, I asked myself why I had ever come. Why I had fallen into this trap so skilfully laid for my heedless feet.

Either the professor had not understood that letter (as indeed how could his simple, unworldly mind understand it!) or had not read it clearly to me. Even when Lady St. Quinton had made that remark about the construction to be placed upon my acceptance of her invitation, I had not quite caught her meaning. Neither had I known that the flowers pinned into my dress and worn so heedlessly, had been a signal of my willingness to listen favorably to that twice-rejected suitor.

My dazed faculties had passed by hints, smiles, innuendoes. Had scarcely even taken in the blundering words of Tommy himself—words excused by copious libations of champagne, by the unusual hilarity of the evening, by everything, until by some vague chance we were standing in a dusky corridor, and a laughing voice had cried, "Good-night, turtle-doves," and then suddenly the light had been extinguished and I was conscious of a suffocating em-

brace, a wild attempt to kiss rebellious lips as I struggled for freedom.

I had rushed wildly away. I was furious, enraged, insulted, pursued still by an echo of that laughing, malicious voice.

"Won't you wait for my felicitations, Paula!"

Her felicitations—hers! Was it she who had planned the scheme, laid the trap? Did they suppose I was going to accept this man because I had consented to meet him, had danced with him to-night, and heard by chance that those flowers were his gift?

My tears ceased as suddenly as they had begun. I lifted my head from the drenched pillow and sat upright on the edge of the bed.

"I see it all," I said. "They want to drive me into an engagement with him. They *sha'n't*! I never shall—never! never!"——

The last "never" was broken upon by a rap at the door—an imperative rap.

"Who is it?" I asked angrily, for I wanted no further disturbance.

"Let me in, Paula," said a voice I knew only too well. "I have something to say to you."

"I am just going to bed," I said coldly. "I am too tired to sit up talking."

"Nonsense. I won't detain you five minutes. I tell you I *must* see you."

Languidly I rose, unloosing the pins of my hair as I moved to the door, and shaking it down to screen my flushed, disordered face. I threw it open.

There, in floating turquoise blue that matched her eyes, her fair hair loosely coiled, stood the Lorely. I closed the door behind her.

"I cannot imagine what you have to say to me,"

I muttered furiously, being now in a rage with myself and life, and the world in general.

She threw herself into a chair. I remained standing.

"Can't you?" she said. "What if I am bent on giving you a little bit of advice, and also telling you of a little discovery I have made?"

I looked at her and said nothing.

"The advice," she went on—"is to marry Tommy as soon as you can manage it—before he learns a certain little secret that might alter his intentions."

I felt my cheeks flame suddenly, but still I kept silence.

"The secret," she said, "is one I learnt by merest chance, but I am rather good at putting two and two together. That has made me successful in life. You cannot have too many people afraid of you, or of what you know about them. Shall I tell you what I know about you, Paula?"

Still I was far from fathoming her real meaning. I thought she alluded to—to something my own heart was holding as a secret—almost from myself.

"Why don't you speak?" she went on. "One would think you were deaf and dumb. Shall I tell you what it is?"

"Yes," I blurted out half unwillingly, goaded to semi-desperation by her mocking glance, her persistence.

"Throw your memory back a little," she said, "to a moonlit night, to a certain entertainment, to a woman on a balcony gazing out at a crowd of up-lifted faces. Look at that woman, Paula—*here!*"

She sprang up, and with one rapid movement turned my face to the glass over the fireplace. My face with all that glittering hair flung loosely back.

My face, that was that other face in its white despair, and the sorrow struggling for expression in dark, tear-stained eyes.

"Now," she went on rapidly, "now you know what I mean. I suspected *then*. In London I felt sure—so sure that I made myself acquainted with certain details of her life. They are at your service—if you wish."

I turned on her then—savage as any robbed and outraged creature can be savage.

"I know what you mean," I said, "I know what you have discovered. I never had a very high opinion of you, Lady Brancepeth, and to-night will scarcely improve it. But as my affairs can scarcely concern you, I would rather not discuss them."

She reseated herself and smiled.

"You were always good at words, Paula, and of course now I know how you come by all those tragedy-queen airs. But please don't run away with the idea that my interest in you is quite disinterested. I assure you it is not. I want you to marry Tommy Yelverton, and Lady St. Quinton also wants to bring it about. She wrote to your guardian explaining that if you were disposed to reconsider your rejection she would expect you here to-night. Tommy knew this. He looked upon your arrival as a sign that you would accept him. We all saw him gather those flowers and send them to your room. We all saw you wear them. After the little episode in the corridor he went down to the smoking-room and told the men it was all right. To-morrow you will be looked upon as engaged, unless you choose to place both yourself and him in a very ridiculous position. That is how the matter stands, and I must say that for a girl who has no

money—no position—and a doubtful *histoiette* in the background, you have one of the best chances ever offered. Such luck doesn't come twice in a girl's way, I assure you."

"Luck——" I echoed scornfully. "You call it luck! The sort of luck that came your way when you married Lord Bobby!"

She flushed to the roots of her fair hair, and her eyes took the cold, hard glitter that meant danger. I had seen that look before. I had seen it when Adam Herivale had avoided her.

I gave her no time to speak. I was too desperately angry.

"What you choose to plan or think, or what anyone *here* chooses to imagine about a situation forced upon me, and of whose nature I was entirely ignorant, does not trouble me in the very least. I am no weak fool to be driven by false circumstances into false action! You and your set, Lady Brancepeth, have taught me a great deal—more perhaps than you imagine. And first and foremost of all is the *disgrace* of the marriages you make!

She started to her feet.

"Disgrace—how dare *you* talk of disgrace! You, whose mother——"

"You shall say nothing against my mother," I interrupted fiercely. "Whatever she has done, her faults lie before the world; they are not hid in holes and corners. Not the outcome of a sensual, evil nature. I know what drove her to the stage—it scarcely deserves to be called a fault beside the hidden vileness of women such as you!"

"How — how *dare* you!" she cried, white now with fury, and perhaps with fear of my own fearlessness.

I laughed. "Dare! There's nothing I would not dare when I'm goaded by such mean and dastardly tricks as have been played on me to-night. Nothing! What have I to fear? What have I ever done that I am ashamed of? Can you say *that*? Can you tell me why you recognized the screen that came from Captain Conway's rooms? Why you wish me to marry one of your discarded lovers? Why you took an honest, clean-minded man from his land and his toil, and his simple, honest life, and tempted him to the world that has ruined you?—— Why——"

I stopped abruptly, for the door had opened, and in the entrance stood the amazed figure of Lady St. Quinton.

"Whatever is the matter, Paula? I heard your voice raised so loudly I came in. What does it mean?"

"It means, my dear, that Paula has been indulging in a fit of heroics," said the Lorely, coolly. "Giving vent to words and feelings wholly unworthy of your teaching. She, in fact, got into a perfectly natural schoolgirl rage because I suggested that her encouragement of poor Tommy has led him to believe she means to marry him."

"So you will, Paula," said Lady St. Quinton sharply.

She closed the door and came forward.

"I will *not*," I said determinedly. "You are all trying to drive me into an engagement by force of strategy. Had you let me alone I—I might have done this thing. But the tricks practised upon me are too disgusting. You have overreached your object. I shall never marry Mr. Yelverton now!"

"I told you it was a case of heroics," said the

Lorely, disdainfully. "Why should we trouble our heads about her? All she pines for is a two-roomed cottage, and a farm lout who will share his porridge and potatoes with her!"

Lady St. Quinton glanced from one face to the other. I had not thought hers could look so angry.

"Really, Paula," she said, "I cannot understand you. You seem to think you can play fast and loose with life and men and social obligations. It is most embarrassing. I undertook a certain responsibility in connection with you, and I have faithfully fulfilled my part of the duty. You—seem determined to be ungrateful."

"I am not ungrateful," I interposed. "I only say I will not be forced into a marriage for which I have no inclination."

"May I ask, then, why you came here—after receiving my letter?" she asked coldly.

"I received no letter. My uncle read out what you wrote to him. There was no mention of any conditions attending this visit."

"They were distinctly stated," she said. "And I repeated them to you on your arrival."

"I was not listening—I did not understand."

"For one who is so quick at drawing inferences, you can be singularly obtuse when it suits you, Paula."

Hot tears of pride and anger rushed to my eyes, but in that one hated presence I would not show any signs of weakness.

"Please remember," went on Lady St. Quinton, "that you are placing me in a very awkward position, and gaining for yourself a most unenviable reputation. Everyone looks upon you to-night as engaged to Mr. Yelverton. It was the subject of

congratulation in the smoking-room. How are you going to explain to him to-morrow that you had no such intention? Are you aware what you will be called?"

I was aware, only too well aware. What evil fate pursued Paula, and labeled every love affair with ever the same obnoxious epithet?

"I cannot help it," I repeated. "It was not my fault. I do not wish to marry Mr. Yelverton, or—or anyone."

"She has an *arrière pensée* for Colin and the porridge, and the two-roomed cottage," sneered Lady Brancepeth, taking her lovely, insolent face and trailing skirts toward the door.

She paused there a moment. "I hardly think she will get them, though. Colin is a little bit tired of his share in the idyl."

CHAPTER VII.

I COULD not sleep.

I was in a fever of mingled rage, grief, anxiety, indignation. Little by little the truth dawned upon me. Little by little the whispers I had heard of the Lorely's arts and fascinations and infidelities pieced themselves into one whole, like the bits of a puzzle map. She had always gained the admiration she desired. Always—save in one instance.

As I thought of her bold looks, her audacious pursuit; as I remembered her cool, cutting remarks on every possible occasion, I felt they had had but one origin—jealousy. She had been jealous of me, and of Adam Herivale's simple devotion to me. And by some means she had got him away from his home, and knew that he lay ill and dying in a public hospital, and yet came here to plot further.

What a search-light her own imprudent words had thrown around her own actions! How swiftly the scales had fallen from her eyes! How clearly I saw now—now, when it was too late! Now when the sorrowful gaze of a dying woman haunted me. Now when afar and beyond call, lay the one faithful, honest heart I had turned from me with careless words.

I felt aged by ten years that night; bitterly humiliated by that scene, shamed in my own sight forever as I thought of my secret at that cruel worldling's mercy. Not my secret only, but the secret of Nina Desallion.

The thought of *her* roused me to fresh anger.

I had tried to vindicate her to my enemy, because I was too proud to show what that story meant to me. But my own heart was bitter and wrathful as ever. She had dealt me my first stroke of suffering. She had torn youth's illusions from my heart, and dethroned an ideal that nothing in the world could ever replace. She had added an added bitterness to that scene to-night. She had barbed the taunts of those cruel lips with a deadlier malice.

The whole weight of those memories overwhelmed me like a torrent. I lay back in my chair, bruised, quivering, agonized as by physical blows; while my too vivid imagination played its tragedy, and I saw myself the sport of my own challenged Fate.

I think I knew Paula at last.

* * * * *

For long confusion reigned, and any clear thought or decision was impossible. Yet I knew they must be faced. I had to meet those people again on the morrow or leave without any explanation. And how could I do that?

They had told me that my engagement was looked upon as a settled thing, proclaimed by the man himself. At least I owed him some explanation. Could I show him the trap and leave it to his honor to free me?

Honor! Had he any? Did any of these men and women know the true meaning of that word? One thing alone they feared—to be made ridiculous—and assuredly Tommy Yelverton would be made ridiculous if I had seemed to accept him one day and reject him the next.

I looked at my position from the point of view of

the two women who had brought it about, followed their arguments, and heard my passionate refutation of them. But still the question remained—what to do?

How the riddle perplexed me—what to do?

* * * * *

“Once you *feel*, Paula,” the professor had said.

Well, God knows I had felt enough to-night, and suffered enough. I felt as if all the hopes of youth had been stifled in me. The laughing, careless acceptance of mere joys was forever at an end.

Time had been an impatient schoolmaster. In this one year I had learnt enough of the world's wisdom and the world's tragedies to live for a memory's lifetime.

The fire was dying down. The house was silent as the grave. I crouched over the dull embers, cold and shivering, and heard the clocks striking in the distance, and still I had arrived at no decision.

Five!— The day was here already. Only four more hours and I must face that hateful ordeal.

A cowardly thought of running away, of going back to the professor and telling him what had happened, came to me. But I rejected it. The dear, simple, old man! How should he understand anything but the plain “Yea” or “Nay” of the matter? How could I expect him to disentangle the thousand threads of its complications?

I pictured my entrance into the breakfast-room. Looks, smiles, congratulations. What a fool I would look if I said, “Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, there is some mistake; I—I didn't mean to accept Mr. Yelverton's proposal!”

And what a fool he would look—poor Tommy, whose only fault was that he was *what* he looked!

But a man can never forgive being publicly presented in his own rightful character.

I threw myself down on the bed and drew the satin eiderdown about me, for I was chilled to the bone now the fever of rage had spent itself. I closed my burning eyes and longed for sleep, but no sleep came.

When the maid appeared with my tea and hot water I was still awake, still irresolute; not knowing whether to brace myself to face the situation or fly from it. Beside my cup of tea lay my letters. I looked at them with no sense of interest. The envelope I opened first was directed in the professor's neat, small hand.

An enclosure fell out of it—addressed to me in a bold, clear handwriting quite unknown. I opened it, surprised to find several sheets of closely covered paper inside. But surprise was swept aside by a stranger and more terrifying emotion as I read on.

"Paula," it began, "I suppose you have learned by now the secret that will doubtless poison your mind against me. I have often wondered whether you would ever know. When I left this country I left with a determination never to return to it. Yet I returned. When I left you—a small, wilful, passionate copy of my own self—I resolved that I would make no attempt to see you, to claim you! Yet—I have seen you, and I am going to claim—something—of you. I fancy I see you start. I fancy I see your face as it looked to me that night across the theatre. I wonder if you guessed what it expressed—disgust, anger, shame! I am going to ask you to look a little into your own heart before you register these feelings as irrevocable. I

am going to claim what is *in* you of **myself**, and show you how the tyranny of Fate may fetter a life.

"I was a restless, discontented girl, beautiful enough to win any man's admiration that I desired, or did not desire. I threw myself into all sorts of pursuits that might cure my restlessness, or subdue my energy, or satisfy my heart. Paula—I found nothing. Have you found anything? For it was my second self I met when I met you a few weeks ago. And all the time I avoided you I was studying that self, and pitying it. The book they spoke of was my book. You were in the library when it was shown to me, and I watched your face and saw how well you knew it. Paula—that book was written as an outlet of that nature and that temperament which drove me to destruction. Child, do you know why I left you? I *felt* that to keep you by me was to make you such a woman as Fate had made me. I knew that nothing simple, peaceful, *good* would ever content me. I tired of love. I never loved any man. I played at it as I play now on the mimic stage that gives me scope for some expression of what I am, or feel. But, Paula, to you let me confess that I am a most unhappy woman. So unhappy that some day, when the string of excitement snaps, I shall not care to live.

"I tell you this to warn you. If there is anything *deep*, or faithful, or *real* in your heart, thank God for it. If you can love, thank God for that; and if you find love, take it, Paula, and reverence the giver, for there is no better thing in life—or worse.

"But you may escape its 'worse.' You have the dearest, kindest, most faithful soul that ever Heaven created, beside you. Be good to him, Paula. I spoilt his life as I spoilt so many. There lies the

irrevocable past behind me. Is there hope, is there consolation, is there—forgetfulness?

“Child, I said I would claim you; but only your attention now—only your pity as you read. Only your forgiveness at some future time when you have learnt to be charitable to faults. For it is very easy, Paula, to condemn a saint that we don't love, and equally easy to forgive a sinner that we do.

“When the heart is empty its doors stand wide to admit any passer-by that chooses to enter. But when it is full, full of love and tenderness, and all the sweet and holy things that women like myself never value, then, child, the idle steps go by, leaving not even an echo behind!

“It would be false sentiment on my part to pretend that maternal love sprang to life at sight and knowledge of you. And, with all my faults, I never pretended any sentiment I did not feel. But—I know I could love you, Paula, did I stay beside you long; and I know—I *fear*—my love would only harm you.

“So I write this, feeling I owe you some explanation, and I beg you to believe that when you hear my name lightly spoken of, I am not as bad as I have seemed to be. But I always loved excitement. I have gone to the very brink of danger to learn its nature, and to try my own powers of resistance. Such experiments are dangerous, Paula. Be warned by me, and do not attempt them.

“I do not suppose we shall meet again. I return to America the day that you will receive this letter.

“You may think a warning from me superfluous, but if you can, break away from those people among whom I found you. They will only do you harm.

“And one thing more let me tell you for your

comfort. If you have never known a mother's love, at least you have not missed a father's. The wise and tender guardianship to which I left *you* is the only wise thing I have ever done in all my rash, and ill-judged, and most reckless life. Perhaps for his sake you will forgive me, as he has forgiven. I think he would never counsel resentment—or revenge.
N. D."

There was no signature. Only those initials.

I sat with the letter in my hand, and all my thronging thoughts of her, and her fate, and mine, brought with them a weight as of years. Nothing could have surprised or startled me more than such a letter. But also, nothing could have so braced my energies for the trial before me. I locked it away till such time as I could read it beside that simple, kindly counsellor to whom I owed so much—locked it away, and then commenced to dress.

The ravages made in my appearance by those past hours were not as visible as I supposed. Cold water and eau-de-cologne reduced my eyes to their normal condition, and even my face to its normal color.

Paula—dressed and in her right mind, presented only a trim, "tailor-made girl," with loose, glittering coils of burnished hair, and a half-proud, half-defiant look in her eyes.

This was the Paula that entered the breakfast-room.

The house party usually dropped in in scattered fashion of one or two. Lady St. Quinton and her husband were there, and a couple of women, and Tommy—a dissipated-looking, blear-eyed Tommy, whose face and hands told tales of midnight potations.

At sight of him all fear left me.

I greeted them in my usual fashion, meeting Lady St. Quinton's questioning glance with perfect non-committal. I saw she was puzzled. Tommy was too owlsh to be effusive. He gave me a chair next his own, and I wished him a cool good morning.

No remarks were made, and I began my breakfast with an appearance of innocence I was far from feeling.

"What a cool little devil you are," murmured my supposed *fiancé*. "Why, I'm in a perfect blue funk this morning. Nervous as a cat, don't-cher-know. Gad! however I'm to stand getting married if the preliminary's bad as this, beats me. How the deuce do women carry off things as they do?"

"By consciousness of superiority," I said. "We don't think it necessary to drink ourselves into imbecility in order to prove we're happy, or have met with some unmerited good fortune."

"Unmerited," he chuckled. "Gad! you're right there, though that's the sort o' thing *I* ought to have said. But I'm no hand at pretty speeches; damn bad lot, Paula, but you'll have to put up with me, don't-cher-know."

I looked at him in wide-eyed astonishment. A battle of voices around drowned our conversation.

"Put up with you! What do you mean, Mr. Yelverton?"

"Oh, come now—*Mister?* Say Tommy."

"There's no more reason why I should say 'Tommy' than there appears to be for what you call 'putting up with you.'"

"Oh, come, I say—after last night?"

"What about last night? You were very rude,

and I felt extremely annoyed, but I excused it and your general behavior on the usual grounds."

"Usual—grounds!"

He stared at me and then at his cup, and then at the untouched ham on his plate. His hand went up to his thin, fair hair and touched it as if seeking assurance that it was his own head it covered.

"Was I—so—so very bad?" he muttered.

"About as bad as you generally are on special occasions," I answered. "But as it was only a joke——"

"A joke?" He half turned and faced me.

"A joke——" I went on inexorably, "for which I expect you to apologize most humbly. You had no right to make use of my name as you did. It was a quite unwarrantable piece of impertinence."

His jaw dropped. He looked a comical fool, as well as Tommy Yelverton.

"By Jove!" he whispered under his breath, "I must have been beastly drunk. Then nothing really—happened?"

(If only Paula's eyes looked as innocent as she meant them to look!)

"Of course not. I got a hint of what you said through Lady St. Quinton. I determined to speak to you. I felt sure you would be sorry for the—mistake, in the morning."

"Damn'd sorry if it's annoyed you. But, Paula," he lowered his voice—"why must it be a mistake? Couldn't you——"

"No—I couldn't. If you will come out in the garden for a few moments after breakfast, I'll tell you *why*."

"I'd do anything in the world for you, and you know it."

"Then drink your tea and try not to look foolish, and if anyone says anything about last night, you must declare it was all a mistake. You've a very good excuse to give. Look at your hand."

It was shaking so that he could not raise his cup to his lips.

"I'm beastly 'shamed," he muttered. "But it serves me right. Lorely bet me I couldn't drink three brandies and then say 'Paula Yelverton' after 'em. And I b'lieve I did, though the *l*'s did bother confoundedly."

The color raced madly to my cheeks. Lorely again! Well, *this* time she had not got the better of me!

At that moment she entered, though she rarely appeared at breakfast. Tommy rose and pushed back his chair. I followed his example.

Under the fire of those insolent eyes, before the gaze of the men who had heard our names coupled in the smoking-room, I walked out beside the man they had chosen to believe was my accepted husband.

An hour later he had explained to Lord St. Quinton the mistake he had made.

That afternoon we both left the Court.

* * * * *

"Then you couldn't make up your mind?" asked the professor, after I had burst into his study, ruffled his hair, disarranged his papers, dragged him away to have tea with me; done everything, in fact, that a wild, free, excited Paula could do, who had "overthrown the tables of the money-changers" for once.

"But I *could*," I said, "and I *did*. And now I've come back to you, to live with you and take

care of you, and be 'happy ever after.' But first, will you let me see Lady St. Quinton's letter?"

He produced it from the torn coat pocket, and I read its diplomatic sentences as I leaned against his knee, safe, sheltered, beloved. (Oh, happy Paula, who had once released a poor trapped rabbit in the woods!)

By the light of what I had learned I could read its meaning—a meaning that had quite escaped his unworldly mind, and my inattentive ears.

It is not right, perhaps, to rejoice over a victory won by strategy, but when I thought of those astute, worldly women bringing their whole artillery to bear on a weak, inebriated fool and an ignorant girl, I felt I had something to thank my wits for—something that had borne me through the ordeal of Tommy's blundering apologies, and left him and his instigators the fools; not Paula—not myself!

* * * * *

At last I summoned courage to show him that other letter, so strangely interwoven with events that were happening, so momentous in its tragic lesson and its fateful warning.

I felt it was right he should know, and that if its message were any compensation for past wrong, for past pain—to-night was a fitting time to deliver it. But I had not thought to see him break down so utterly before its cynical sadness. I had not thought to see *his* tears blister the pages that he handed back to my keeping.

* * * * *

Dear, dear old man, how I loved him that night! How I blessed him for the lessons he had taught out of that wise brain, and gentle, humane heart of his!

For long I had not prayed. For long rebellion and pride and resentment had ruled my every feeling. That night, under the shadow of the old, gray, clustering roofs, under the brooding wings of the old, ivied ruins, my stubborn heart bowed itself, and I cried, "Thank God for love!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTMAS EVE again.

Two years have gone since I first landed at Scarffe Station, unmet, unloved, and apparently unwanted; with no special place in life, and little in my heart but an overweening curiosity concerning it.

Two years.

There is snow on the ground to-night, and a cold, white moon shines in the sky, and the castle lifts its ivied towers and broken archways to the glittering stars.

An hour ago I had been looking over the blurred pages, the hasty scrawls, the foolish conceits of a girl called Paula.

There they were. Traced with almost cruel truth by the thinker who had thought them, the actor who had acted them. Faults of friend and foe. Youth's hasty judgment — youth's selfish indifference — youth's fateful mistakes, there they were!

I read them through tears of sorrow and of shame. I read them as a story truer than any printed page had ever held. Will any read them in like manner?

* * * * *

For a year they had ceased. Ceased abruptly, for the writer had had no heart to yield to self-confession.

Perhaps she had begun to fear it.

But the year is over now, and it needs but little to

complete this story of a girl who "scribbled with her mind."

Claire, who said that, has married the Vicomte de Chaumont. She tells me she is happy as the day is long.

Well, her nature knew its need and satisfied it. Let her pass from the procession. Who comes next? Lesley. Alas, my pretty, best-loved Lesley! What of your life-story goes to fill these few blank pages?

In Rome Lesley lies, a victim to malarial fever, so they say. There is more than one name for a broken heart. I saw her grave in the English churchyard a brief while ago, for the professor and I have had a year of foreign travel, and Claire's Paris and Lesley's Riviera have also come to Paula through her own eyes.

But she had no heart to write of them. No heart to write anything. No want of aught in life but just that kindly presence, that simple guidance, whose true value suffering had taught her.

A year! It seems double the length of the first year. But it has been less eventful. Its close finds me back in the old gray house, the only place that has ever seemed to mean home. Merrieless is married, but Graddage still rules us with severe gaze and sternest of texts. Yet even Graddage's face looked friendly after so many foreign chambermaids.

I had been to see Merrieless before opening the locked drawer that held that old journal. It is since reading over these bits about her that I realize how much good her simple common sense has done me.

Very odd things are factors in the moulding of character, and sometimes very small ones.

* * * * *

But when I saw that dangling pencil hanging by a cord to the thick-lined volume, and when some impulse moved me to write an ending to those unfinished records, I did not ask myself what the ending might be for that curious scribbler to whom they owe their existence.

I took the thought of them and the story of them to the one place about which their interest clings, and here I found—another chapter.

Perhaps a happier and a better than any yet written.

And so, for sake of what already stands confessed, for sake of one true, noble soul, that to my mind seems to dwarf the petty, self-consequent one that has already spoken, I am going to write the story I heard in the old gray ruins to-night.

* * * * *

How dark they were and quiet as the sun's rays faded behind the hills, its last bars of gold just outlining their highest point! And as the dusk swept softly downward, the twinkling lights of farm and cottage shone from near and far.

I watched the evening star arise below the faint white of the moon. The cold air, with the brine of the sea in its breath, blew keen and chill from the coast, and brought with it a hundred memories of other days spent here, and all the changes that had come and gone.

I leaned against the sheltering tower, and suddenly through the dusky gateway I saw a figure advance. Dark as it was, the step and form seemed familiar. With a gladness wholly irrepressible I stepped forward and in a moment we were face to face. The moon was half veiled by clouds, and left us in shadow.

"Adam!" I cried, and then my cheeks burned and my outstretched hands fell.

We were no longer in shadow, the moon threw its radiance over his uplifted face, white and stern, and unlike the face I had not seen for so long.

"Miss Trent," he said coldly. "I—I thought you were away—abroad?"

"We only came back yesterday," I said.

My gladness and surprise were abruptly checked. He had not even shaken hands with me.

"How is your mother?" I asked, feeling more embarrassed than I had ever felt in all my life.

"She is a little better we all think."

"I am glad of that. I am coming to see her tomorrow."

"She will be very pleased, I am sure. She missed you very much this last year."

How stiff and formal and stupid it all was! I grew impatient.

"Are you quite well and strong again yourself? She was terribly anxious about you when you had that fever."

"I know. I heard much of your kindness, Miss Trent. The hours you spent with her, the help you were, the way you cheered and comforted her. She often says she couldn't have borne up but for you."

"I did very little," I said. "Very little. Adam—do you mind telling me something?"

His eyes met mine. The cold, white light above our heads made him look strangely pale.

"Perhaps I ought not to ask; please don't think it's from idle curiosity. But I should like to know *why* you went to London?"

His eyes flashed, widened, then dropped.

"I went," he said sternly, "because I was driven;

driven by restlessness and misery, and the sort of longing that comes to a man and sets his blood to roving. I went because I had grown tired of this place, the dullness, the monotony. Of the self-same hills on which the sun rose and set, and the wagons that crossed and recrossed them, and the grain that was sown for the sickle, and the hay-cutting and harvesting that any clod might tend as well as I. Life widened suddenly for me and I lost content. That, Miss Paula, was why I went to London."

My heart leaped. "But you have come back—to the farm?" I said hesitatingly.

"Not to stay. Only to spend Christmas. To cheer my mother's heart a bit. In a week I shall have gone again."

"A week," I echoed disappointedly. "So soon?"

"'Tis long enough," he said, "to be reminded of old sorrows—and the pain that drove me hence."

I was silent for a moment.

"Adam," I said at last, "do you know it was two years ago this very night that you and I first met?"

"I think," he answered slowly, "I do not need reminding of *that*. I wonder you should remember it."

His face showed no signs of softening. I wondered vaguely if it were sorrow or anger he so sternly repressed.

"Why did you come here to-night?" I went on.

"Why did *you*—Miss Paula?" he asked.

"I have been away a whole year," I said. "And in that year I have learned much, seen much, suffered much. But nothing can kill out the memory of this place. Often, in others as ancient, as historical, I have come back *here*, seen that leaning

tower, and the ancient gateway, and the moon clear above the old, gray pile——”

“A summer moon?” he asked slowly.

I was silent.

He went on. “There’s been many and many a day and night in my life this last year when I’ve stood here, too—in memory—and thought of words said—and the deep, sad loneliness they left behind; and of something that changed the light of hill and home for one man, and drove him to the world to find—forgetfulness.”

“Did he find it, Adam?”

“No,” he said, “I’m afraid he’s not one of the forgetting sort. It seems strange that a slip of a girl should come between a man and all that’s made his life before he saw her. Stranger still that he should be driven back to his sorrow only by sight of some place that’s known the tread of her feet, the touch of her hand. But I suppose it’s Nature.”

He sighed heavily.

“Shall we be walking back?” he said.

I moved on beside him mechanically. My heart was full of vague pain. The chill of the wind was less chilling than the tone of his voice, or the words that put the present away—for sake of the past.

“You, Miss Paula,” he said presently, “will not be stopping long here, I suppose?”

“I hope I shall,” I answered. “I have no desire to leave it. I have seen two worlds, Adam—the world of the country, and the world of the town. I know which is best, I think.”

“This,” he said, “is the best—till thought gets too strong to be killed; then turmoil is better than quiet.”

“What thought did you flee from?” I asked

softly. "From the thought of that white witch who tempted you to town?"

He started.

"No one tempted me!"

"Adam," I said reproachfully, "think again. Were there no promises of a great future? No offer of place and position that should make a noble yeoman into an ignoble nobody?"

"How have you heard such things?" he demanded.

"A little gossip, a little scandal, a little piecing of a puzzle. I told you I had learned a great deal in this past year, Adam."

"I'm sorry if you've believed anything that would make me seem unworthy of your notice."

"Notice," I said petulantly. "Oh, Adam, what a hateful word! What has come to you?"

"I was told," he said slowly, "that you laughed at and despised me—called me a clod—a country bumpkin."

"It is not true!" I cried passionately. "I never did!"

"I am glad to hear that," he said. "It poisoned a good deal of life for me, Miss—Paula. I set to work at a new sort o' business, but buying and selling don't come natural to one who has lived face to face with Nature, and laughed under the free heavens, and watched the seasons come and go by signs that town-folk never notice. I grew weak and ill, and then fever laid hold on me, and not a soul to speak to, or comfort me. Only for thought o' my mother and how she was bound up in me, and the words they sent from home, I shouldn't have cared how it ended. But I'm alive and hearty again."

"And we have met—again," I said. "And a

great deal has happened, Adam, to change us both."

"A great deal," he echoed. "Yet not so much that it hasn't left me still where I was when I heard those laughing words o' yours, echoing mine. Shall I remind you o' them again, Miss Paula?"

"Perhaps I don't need reminding, Adam. Perhaps my memory, too, is faithful. I think the words were but three, were they not? And—" I paused and turned, and pointed up to where the old, grim pile stood, half shadow and half starlight — "and you spoke them *there*, Adam. You said you were——"

"At your service, Miss Paula."

"But many months have come and gone since you said it."

"They have left me — at your service still," he said.

"Then do not call me Miss—Paula ever again."

[THE END.]

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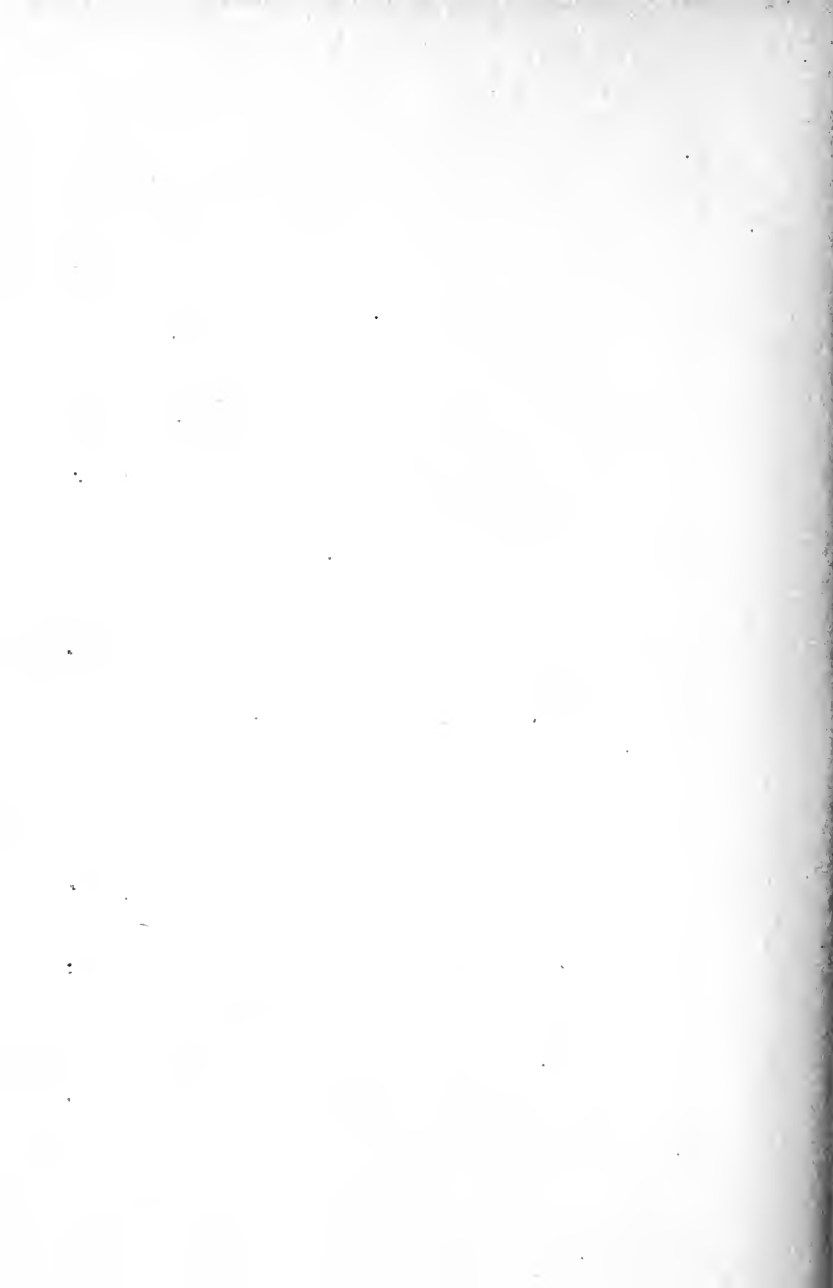
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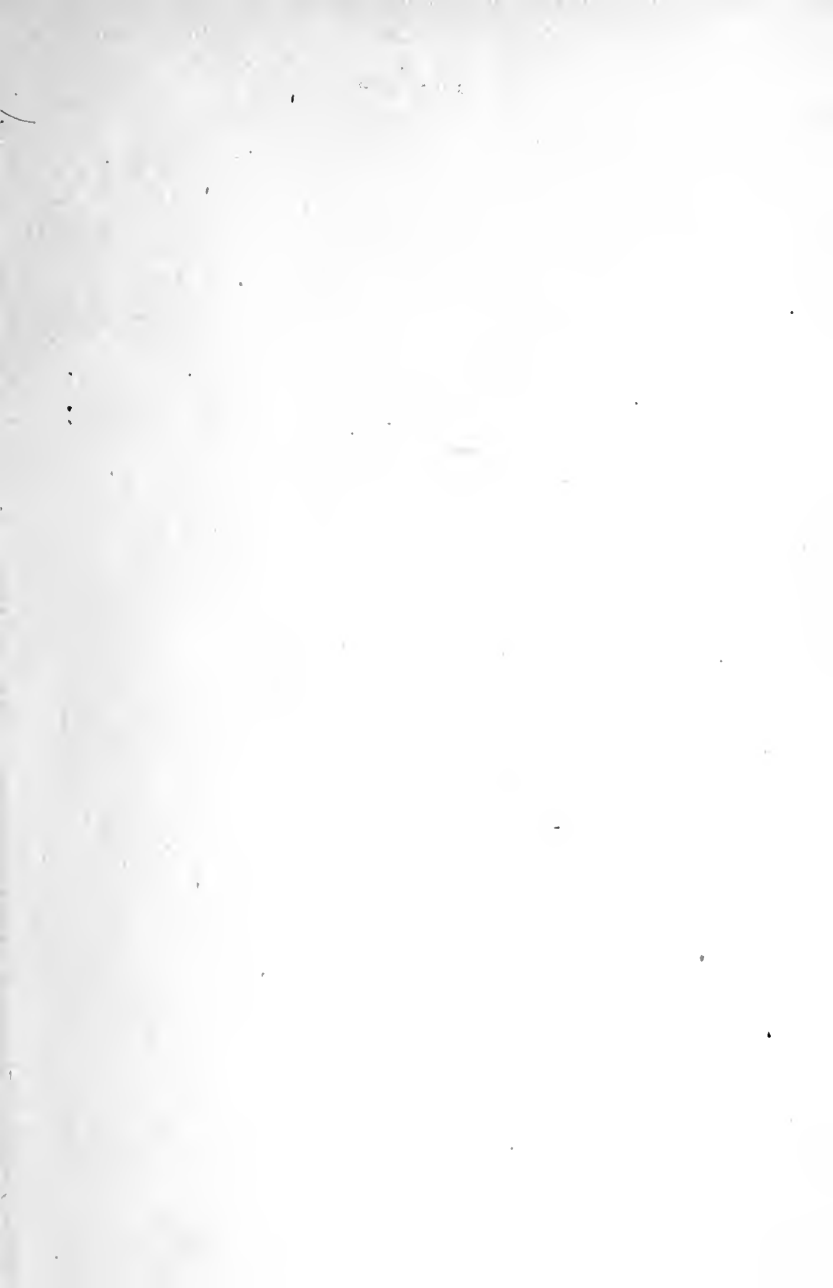
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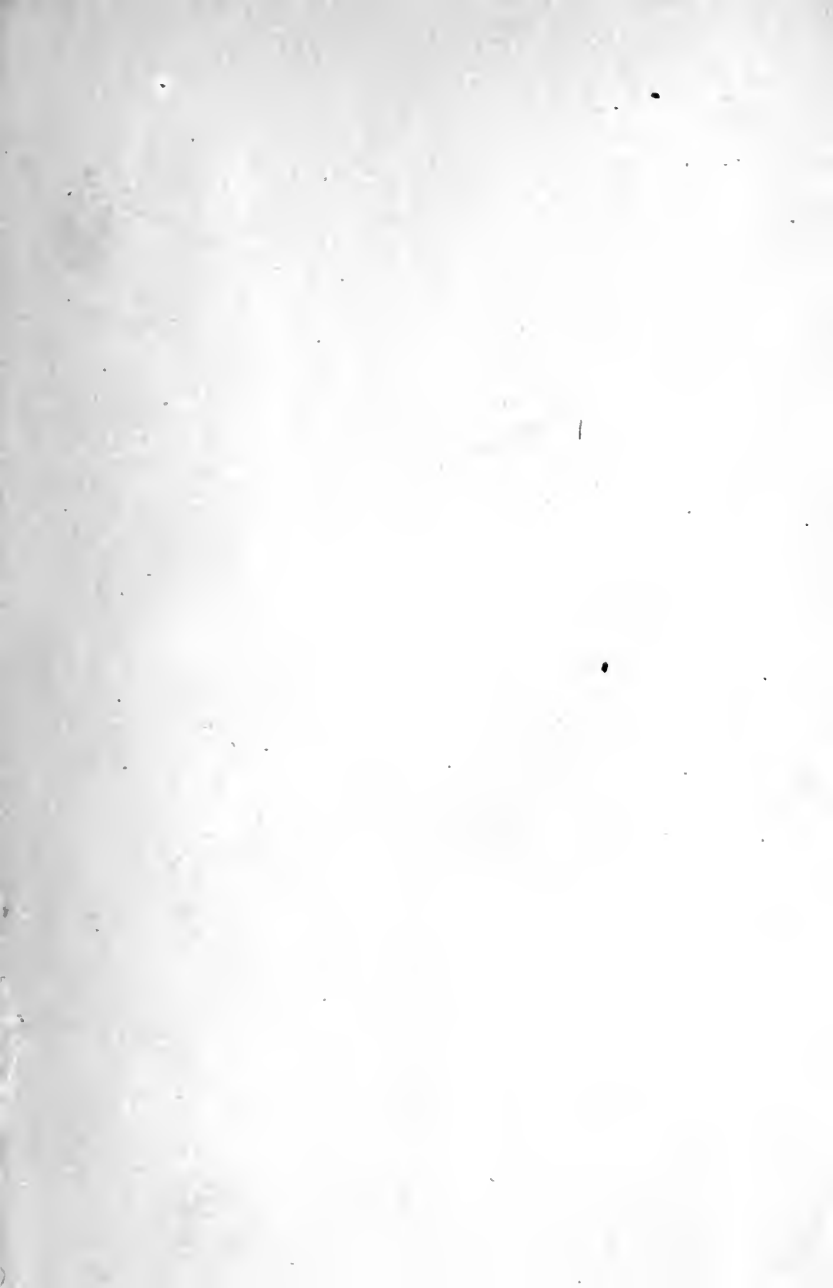


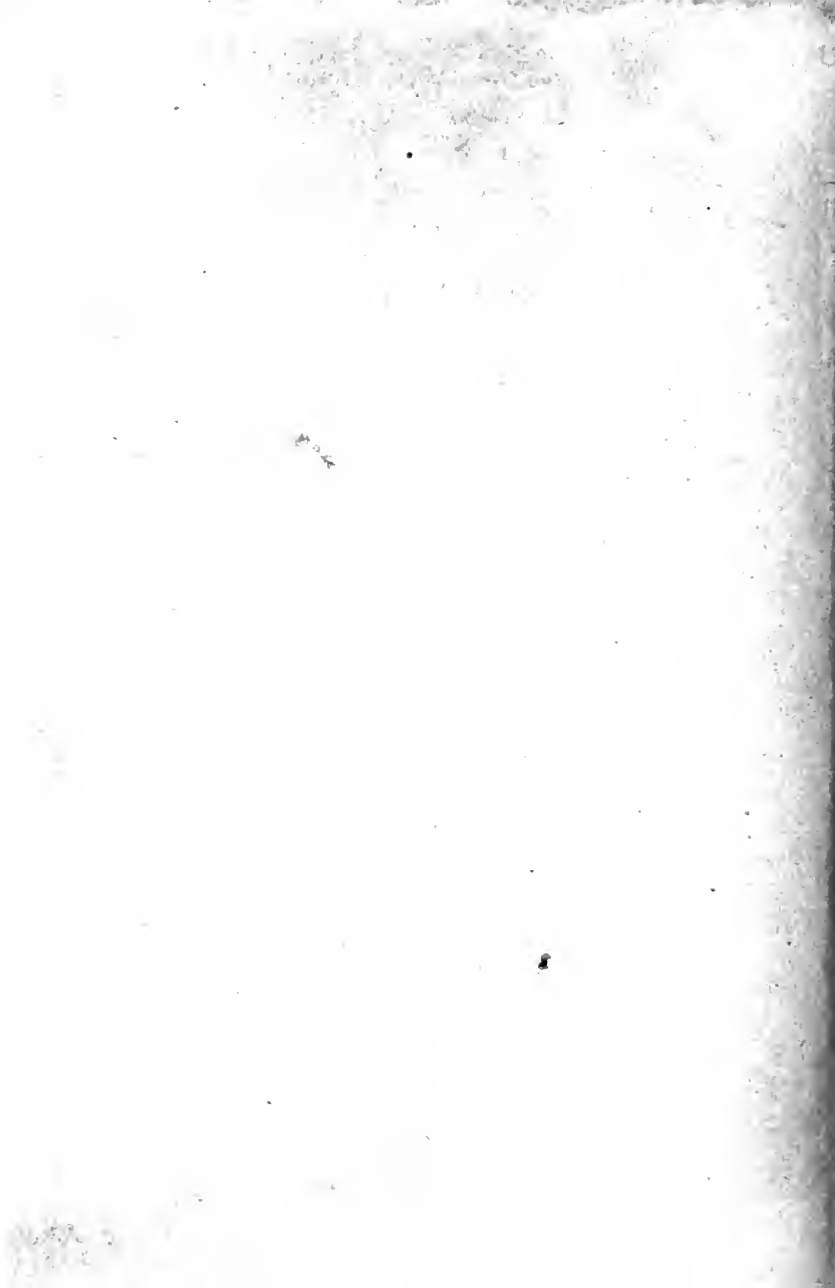
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